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STEVEN LAWRENCE,

Yeoman.

BY MRS. EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF

"ARCHIE LOVELL," "THE MORALS OF MAY FAIR,"

ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



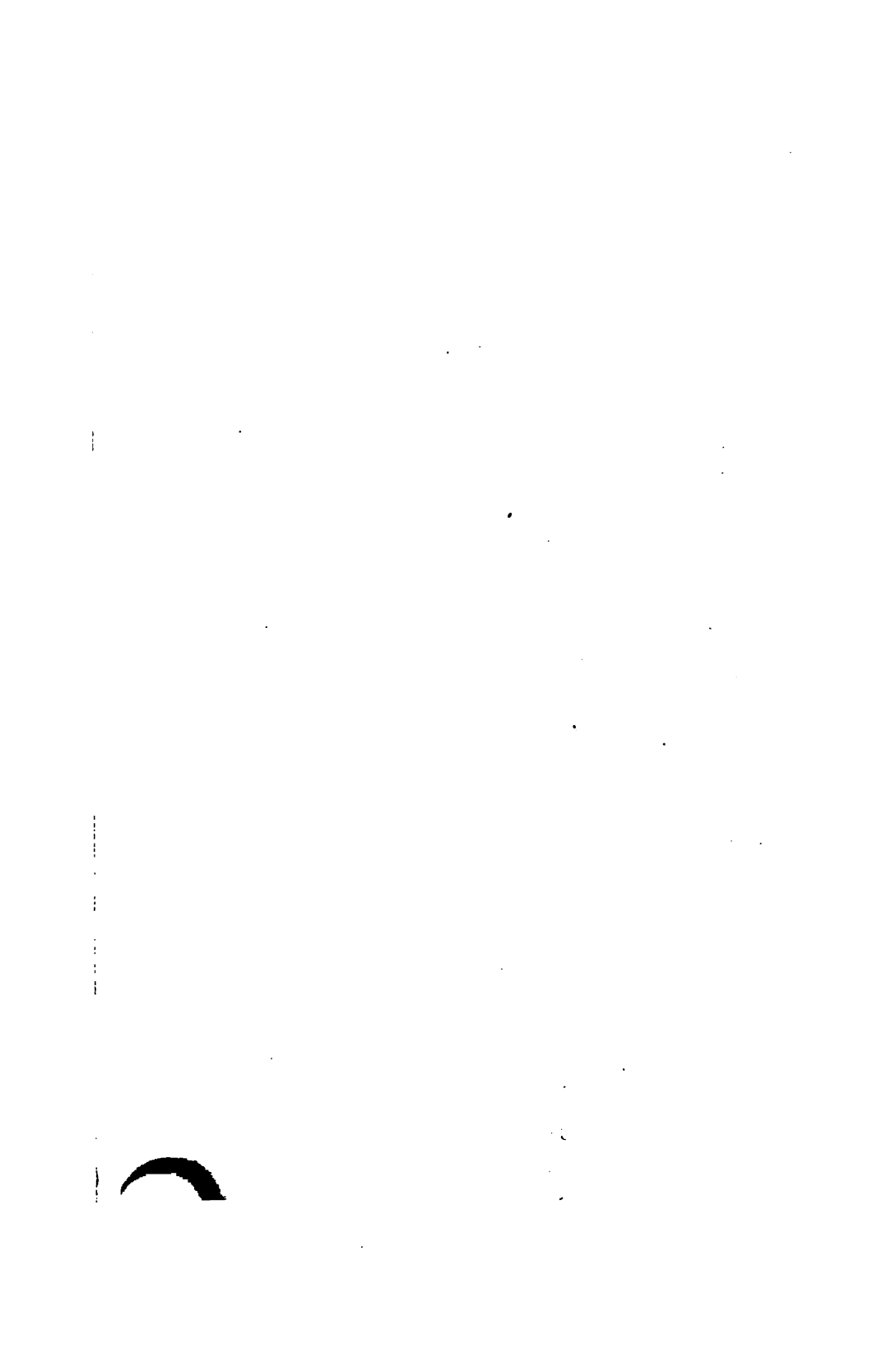
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STEVEN LAWRENCE, YEOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

STREPHON AND PHILLIS.

IT was a bright cool evening; one of those May evenings in which spring and summer mingle so deliciously that while you welcome the coming roses you more than half regret the fickle hawthorn-scented month that is dying. The cheerful dappled sky, the blossoming orchards, the waves of fawn and pink and soft dun green in the grassfields as the light wind passed over them, made up just the kind of gentle, homely picture whose charm, like that of Gainsborough's paintings, or Cowper's verses, we can never analyse and never outlive. Even Dot, who seldom paid nature the attention of remembering whether the sun was rising or setting, summer blooming or fading, was alive to

the freshness and fragrance of the "background" as she stood beside Steven on the Squire's lawn, and looked round—wondering what subject would be the best to begin upon—at the smiling country.

"How delightfully green everything is looking, Mr. Lawrence! what a relief after London! I was so glad, and to speak honestly *so* surprised, when Katharine consented to come home on Sunday."

Katharine had just found some excuse for leaving them alone together; and Steven, one of whose savage habits it was to remain silent when he had nothing to say, was standing watching the flutter of her summer dress as she re-crossed the lawn in the direction of the house. "I beg your pardon, Miss Dora," he cried, as Dot's penetrating voice recalled him to a sense of her existence. "You were saying——"

"How glad I was that I had been able to get away from town rather earlier than usual this season—thanks to Lord Petres' departure!" added Dot, maliciously. "Would you mind walking about a little? Katharine will find us just the same; but I find it too chilly to stand, and the dew is falling."

Steven walked on by her side obediently;

and Dot led him to a broad grass terrace, shut away by shrubs out of sight of the house, and with a full view of Clithero Bay, unruffled now as a little inland lake, and with the smooth high tide breaking on the sandy beach, scarcely more than a stone's-throw beneath where they stood. "This is the terrace I reminded you of in my letter," said Dot. "Do you remember it? Do you remember one Sunday evening when I was here, and saw you in your boat——"

"And came down and went out to sea with me," interrupted Steven. "I do remember it well, though I suppose I haven't thought of it for ten years or more; and how frightened we both were of being found out—I, because I knew I had been breaking the Sabbath, and you—you, Miss Dora, because you knew what your aunt and cousin would say to you for being seen in my company."

Dot was silent for a moment; then, with a want of abashment so entire as to make Steven feel excessively abashed, and at the top of her voice, she carolled forth a stanza from the time-worn song about thorns and flowers, and the willingness of the singer to give up the hopes of years for those "bygone hours." In all the best theatrical represen-

tations of country courtship which she had seen it had been the successful custom of the heroine to enliven the prose part of the scene with verses of song, delivered in a loud voice, and with arch glances at the hero, and poor Dot really was doing her best to act a pretty Phillis to this great obtuse Strephon at her side. Katharine had cautioned her not to talk of balls and Paris and London, as she would to Mr. Clarendon Whyte, but to be simple, and, above all, natural in her conversation with Steven Lawrence; and Dot's ideas of nature and simplicity were to pay pretty compliments to the setting sun, and wear a broad straw hat trimmed with blue ribbon, and give arch glances, and sing. Was it her fault if the yeoman failed to appreciate the part that she was acting down to his level and for his benefit?

"I—I have something I want particularly to say to you," she cried at last, as Steven stood silent, and looking rather less affected than she had expected by the song; "but I hardly know how to begin it. When your cousin died, and Uncle Frank did not think things about the farm were going on as they ought, I undertook to write, because they all said you would remember me best—

and then, you know, I sent you my photograph. Please tell me you didn't think it a very strange thing for me to do?"

"Now is my time!" thought Steven; for, cost him what it might, he had already fully made up his mind to set matters straight with Dora Fane. "I'd as lief be shot, as have to hurt the poor little thing's feelings, but there's no choice left me!" And then, stammering like a guilty schoolboy, and not daring to look at her, he blurted the truth out. "You sent me—it was very good of you to think of me at all, I'm sure—but you sent me your cousin's photograph, not your own! I have never had a chance to tell you this before. Of course, as soon as I saw you both together in town, I knew you had made a mistake, and that I must ask your pardon for the letter I wrote, and—and there's no harm done!" he went on, desperately, "and I hope, Miss Dora, you'll show you forgive me, by giving me your own now." All this in a breath, as if he had been saying a lesson learnt by rote; but, as you may remark, clearing himself most explicitly, and not abating a syllable from the disagreeable or unflattering part of his explanation.

Dora Fane gave one quick upward look at

his face. Something she saw there—his earnestness, perhaps, or his confusion—amused her; and she had to bite her lip hard to repress a smile. “Katharine’s picture! Now, *could* I really have made such a ridiculous mistake? At all events, you were the gainer, Mr. Lawrence. Kate makes such a beautiful photograph, doesn’t she? and I really can’t see why you should talk about asking any one’s forgiveness. Keep dear Kate’s picture, by all means, as you have been lucky enough to get it, and I’ll give you one of my own too, with pleasure. Do you like full-lengths or vignettes best?”

“And there are people who say women are not generous!” thought Steven. Could a man have got over a wound to his vanity so quickly, however indifferent he might have been to the woman who gave it? “Whatever you like to give me, I shall be grateful for, Miss Dora. The picture that is the best likeness of you would please me most.”

“Well, for the matter of that, I never think these very small photographs have much real likeness in them,” said Dot, impartially. “Now Kate and I, little as you would think it, are often taken for each other in our cartes de visite. Is it possible

that you have been mistaken after all? Was the photograph a vignette, or what? You couldn't show it to me, of course?"

"Oh yes, I could," answered Steven, in his simplicity, and taking the locket from his waistcoat pocket. "Can you open it?—so. A wonderfully good likeness I call that, as far as I can judge."

Dora looked at the photograph; confessed at once to her stupidity; admired the setting of the locket—had no idea they sold such pretty things in barbarous countries like Mexico—and then returned it quietly into Steven's hands. "If Lord Petres was a jealous man, I might make nice mischief, by telling him that you wear Katharine's photograph, mightn't I?" she cried, with another sidelong glance at Steven's face, to assure herself that the shot told.

"I think not, Miss Dora," he answered; "Lord Petres could no more mind my possessing Miss Fane's picture, than the Emperor of France could mind my wearing one of the Empress, if I had the folly to choose to do so."

"No, of course, Lord Petres would not mind. I said *if* Lord Petres was jealous, he might not like it. But Lord Petres is not jealous—very fortunately for him," added

Dot, with emphasis, "Lord Petres is not jealous."

"Well, no, I should say not," said poor Steven. "What has a man like Lord Petres to be jealous of? He has fortune, birth—"

"And Katharine Fane for his future wife!" cried Dot, as Steven hesitated. "Mr. Lawrence, is not my cousin beautiful?"

"Ay," said Steven, "that indeed she is, and not beautiful only."

"No; Katharine has something in her voice and manner that makes every one love her. I'm fonder of her than of any one else in the world. She has always been my friend from the first day they brought me here. Oh! it makes me shudder, actually shudder," cried Dot, "when I think of what my life will be after Katharine goes."

"Goes!" exclaimed Steven, blankly. "Goes! but when will that be?"

"Why, when she marries, to be sure," said Dot. "It is impossible that the wedding can be delayed later than this autumn. They have been engaged—let me see—nearly a year and a half already, and there has always been something, hitherto, to delay the marriage. At first Katharine said she was too young; then Lord Petres was too ill; then Lord Petres' French cook gave warning;

then Lord Petres' French cook would stay. But now it really is coming off, I believe. It will be a charming marriage for dear Kate, you know. Lord Petres has I can't say how many thousands a year, and is a very nice little man, and Katharine is *so* attached to him, and then he is a Catholic, and everything."

"And is Miss Fane a Catholic?" asked Steven, feeling more hopelessly far from Katharine at every word Dot uttered, "I thought she was at church with you and the Squire yesterday?"

"Oh yes! she goes to the church of England, and nominally belongs to it still," said Dot; "but everybody knows where Kate's heart is—indeed she makes no secret of her intention of returning openly to the church after her marriage. We are all Catholics by birth, you know, only my aunt when she married Mr. Hilliard, went over, from indolence I believe, to his way of thinking, and so Kate and Arabella were brought up to be Protestants. Religion was not a subject Arabella troubled her head about, but Kate, young as she was, never in heart went away from the old faith. You know our rector—no? Well, nothing but his being so high—oh, ultra, ultra high!" cried Dot, stretching up her

small hand as if to represent the very pinnacles of ritualism, "would make Kate tolerate him as she does."

"And you, Miss Dora?" said Steven, "are you a Catholic or a Protestant, or half one and half the other, like your cousin?"

"I? oh, Mr. Lawrence!" and Dot shook her head and looked solemn, "I'm a firm Protestant; indeed, if I have a leaning it is altogether the other way. I like to have the word preached to me without adornment. No incense, no vestments, no grand church shows for me! My religion is plain and humble, as my position in life must be."

She spoke with a ring of mournfulness in her voice; and Steven, whose upright soul never suspected man or woman of insincerity, felt his sympathies increase towards her. Could this be the woman of whom Lord Petres had said that she would be about as good a companion for a man as a gilt butterfly? the frivolous woman with expensive tastes, who in London had had Mr. Clarendon Whyte for her intimate companion, and gone into raptures over Mademoiselle Fleuri's last new wig? "If you like a plain religion you should come to our chapel some Sunday," he remarked; and Dora detected a warmer tone in his voice. "You will hear

the word preached without adornment of any kind there. But I suppose," added Steven doubtfully, thinking less perhaps of Dora Fane's individual principles than of the class she represented ; " I suppose you would hold it altogether beneath you to go inside a dissenting meeting-house ?"

" If I followed my own inclinations I would go there every Sunday of my life," said Dot, " I am weary of all the intoning, and bowing, and vain observances we get at the parish church, but of course, placed as I am, I have to consider others. Really I don't think Katharine would ever forgive me if she knew I had been to Shiloh. Once, years and years ago, I remember I went there to evening service, and I believe I was in disgrace for six months afterwards at least ?"

" I remember," said Steven, " it was before I went to America. You came in with Hoskins, who was apprenticed at that time, Miss Dora, to old Blake at Stourmouth."

The colour rose into Dot's face at the maladroitness ; but the light had faded too much for Steven to notice it. " In those days," said she, " we used to be Dora and Steven to each other ! I don't know, as old friends, why we should be so formal in our way of speaking now ?"

"In those days we were children, or little more," remarked Steven promptly. "In those days I was ignorant of the difference between your station and mine."

"Well, I hoped—I mean I thought—from your letter you would show the same happy ignorance still!" said Dot. "Station! oh, I have heard about rank and station till I am sick of the very thought of them. But of course it shall be as you like!" She stopped, and sighed.

Thoroughly honest though Steven was, it was not to be expected that he would repulse an offer of friendship so humbly, so hesitatingly tendered, or remind Dora, a second time, that his letter had been written, in truth, to Katharine, not to her! Perhaps, if I must confess all his weakness, the prospect of being on terms of equality with Katharine's cousin was not displeasing to him; perhaps in his inmost thoughts it seemed to him that friendship with Dora might bridge over, by ever so little, the gulf which divided him from Lord Petres' future wife!

"You are all goodness to me, Miss Dora, and nothing would flatter me more than to hear you call me by my name as you used, only——"

——“Only, remember you will have to call me by mine in return.”

“I . . . really, I don’t think I could,” said Steven shyly. “You must remember I haven’t spoken to a lady for these ten years. I don’t think I could ever bring myself to commit such a boldness.”

“Oh yes, I think you could when you get a little less afraid of me!” cried Dot, with one of her shrill laughs. “I, at all events, shall begin speaking to you at once as I used to speak in the days when we were not too old to be natural!”

And she was as good as her word. When Miss Fane rejoined them, some minutes later, the first sound she heard was Steven’s name, proceeding, in the most perfectly matter-of-course tone imaginable, from Dot’s lips. And Katharine’s heart revolted from the sound! Her dream—a minute ago she would have told herself, her desire—had been that Steven and Dora should marry. To this end she had forgiven him his fatal error when he first met her in Hertford Street; to this end had made the Squire invite him to dinner; to this end had schooled Dora as to the wickedness of regretting a man like Clarendon Whyte, and risking the loss of an affection sterling and true as Steven’s. Yet now, so perverse,

so inexplicably crooked is human nature, now that her ears assured her an explanation had taken place between them; that if they were not lovers, they were certainly walking in the right road to become so, a pang sharper than she had suffered in her whole life (a life, remember, which had never yet known love or jealousy), contracted her heart. She remembered Steven's supplicating voice when she parted from him last; remembered the pressure of his hand; remembered the expression of his face as he stood and watched their carriage drive away from the Opera House; remembered how, when she had been on her knees that night, the thought of him had come between her and heaven, and how she had prayed that his madness might pass away, and that poor little Dora might become his wife. Well, the prayer that had seemed so presumptuous then was answered: that was all! Three days later, and her prayer was answered; and Steven, just as inconstant as if he had been civilized for years, was paying his suit to Dora already. It was right, very right. The poor yeoman had been brought to see the folly of his love, and had renounced it—lightly as men do renounce their love—and she would be spared the indignity of having to repulse him anew. She

had managed the whole affair beautifully; and Dot should never know the humiliation to which she had been forced to stoop for her sake. It was right, very right; and coming to her cousin's side, she put her hand with a kindly little pressure upon her shoulder. Then, Dot's unceasing voice masking the silence of her companions, they all three walked slowly back along the terrace.

Dora accompanied Steven Lawrence into the house to say good-night to the Squire and Mrs. Hilliard, but Katharine just at this minute managed to disappear from the scene, and when Steven came out again to start for his homeward walk, he felt that, either by intention or through indifference, which was worse, she had avoided him. The fresh spring evening had darkened into a still, almost sultry, night; and when he had got about half way along the Squire's avenue, Steven bethought himself that it would be pleasanter to return home, smoking his pipe and dreaming of Miss Fane, by the cool sea-shore, than along the dusty road. A flight of steps led down from the terrace to the beach, he remembered, just at the spot where Dora had sung to him about "bygone hours;" and retracing his steps he made his

way past the house, thence by the upper lawn and through the shrubberies to the eastern end of the terrace: the end from whence, in daylight, the low white walls of Ashcot could be seen across the blue sweep of Clithero Bay. The night was moonless, but there was sufficient glimmering twilight left to discern objects at ten or fifteen yards distant; and as Steven was walking quickly on, he caught sight of a figure leaning against the terrace-wall, just at the head of the steps by which he had to pass. It was Katharine: her white dress fluttering through the gloom, the outline of her head and throat showing delicately clear against the vapoury background of grey sea and sky. Steven made his way on noiselessly across the close-shorn turf, and in another moment was at her side. "Miss Katharine," said he, under his breath, "won't you say good-night to me before I go?"

She turned round to him with a half-frightened cry: "Mr. Lawrence, how you startled me! Was it in this ghostly fashion you used to steal down upon the bears and panthers, sir? I never thought any one would miss me. I only came away because—"

"Because?" asked Steven, as she hesitated.

"Oh, because I detest having to go in to hot rooms and candle-light at this time of the year. I like to stand here alone when it is dark like this, and hear, or fancy I hear, the tide turn. It has just ebbed now. Stay silent for a while, and see if you can't detect a farther-off sound in each fall of the waves."

Steven remained silent as she bade him, not listening to the waves, or to any other sound in the universe, but with his eyes fixed intently upon the exquisite, shadowed face at his side. After a few minutes, Katharine looked up to him again.

"Now, wasn't there a difference. Could you not distinctly tell that the last wave was farther away from us than the one before?"

"I was not thinking of the waves at all," answered Steven. "I never heard whether they rose or fell."

"Mr. Lawrence, are you speaking in earnest?"

"Quite in earnest, Miss Fane. Don't you remember the bond I am under to tell the truth, and nothing but the truth, to you?"

"Oh, but I think that bond is cancelled!" cried Katharine. "The moment we began to put it into practice, I found that listening to truth was much less agreeable than I had

expected, and got cross with you : do you recollect ?”

“I recollect,” said Steven ; “but I don’t think you need be angry with me for telling the truth now. I never heard the break of the waves, just as I never heard the voices of the singing people at the theatre, because I was with you, and—”

“Ah, Mr. Lawrence, please—please—don’t pay me a compliment !” interrupted Katharine, shrinking a little away, and in her heart retracting every harsh thing she had thought of Steven during the last half hour. “If you knew how tired I am of pretty complimentary speeches, I am sure you would never make me any again as long as you live.”

“I will always do exactly as you bid me at the moment,” said Steven with humility ; “if telling the truth is making a pretty complimentary speech, of course I will tell the truth no more.”

“That’s right. You know I am looking forward to seeing you very often at our house, and I want you, really and truly, to look upon me as a friend. There can be no pretty speeches or compliments between people who are friends in earnest, can there ?”

Steven said not a word ; and Katharine

Fane felt more strangely, more humiliatingly embarrassed than she had ever felt in her life before by his silence.

"I was very glad to see you and mamma get on so well," she began desperately, after two or three minutes' dead pause; "and Dora, too—you and Dora must have so much to say to each other after all these years. I—I hope we shall see you again before very long."

"As soon as you tell me to come, I will come," answered Steven, with his accustomed bluntness.

"Well, Wednesday then, or to-morrow if you will; you will be quite sure to find Dora and poor mamma at home, whenever you call—Listen! can that really be ten o'clock that is striking? Oh, Mr. Lawrence, I think I must go in now," and she took a step or two in the direction of the house. "It is getting so dark and——"

"And you *will* wish me good night, Miss Fane, will you not?"

"Why, of course, I will. Good night."

She held out her hand; but Steven, not knowing that she had offered it, turned shortly away; the sweet "Good night" making him only too contented—poor wretch! and Katharine stood and watched

his tall figure until it was lost from sight among the purple shadows on the beach.

When she got back to the house the first person she saw was Dora, candle in hand, on the staircase. "What, Kate!" cried Dot, looking round, "I thought you had gone to bed an hour ago—and how white you are!" scrutinising her narrowly. "Did you see Steven Lawrence as he went away?"

"I saw Mr. Lawrence for a moment, Dot."

"And what did he tell you?"

"Tell me? Nothing in particular. I only saw him for a moment," and Katharine hesitated.

"Oh, I didn't know," cried Dot, carelessly; "I thought, perhaps, he might have told you of our conversation. I explained to him the mistake about the photograph, and it appears he knew it was yours from the first—that's all. We quite understand each other now, Kate."

"I suspected as much when I heard you calling him 'Steven,'" said Katharine, quietly. "Ah, Dot, I wonder how soon this first act of the play will be over? I wonder how soon I shall have to offer you good wishes in earnest?"

"'A Sainte Blaize, à la Zuecca,'"

sang Dot ;

“ ‘ Dans les prés fleuris cueillir la verveine.
... Mais de vous en souvenir
Prendrez vous la peine ?’

Kate,” peeping down through the banisters, and looking more weirdly like a painted porcelain figure than ever, “ how glad I am I took your advice about Steven ! It *does* so set one’s conscience at rest, to be perfectly honest and straightforward, doesn’t it ?”

“ I don’t think I know, Dot. I’m not quite sure whether I have a conscience or not,” answered Katharine, modestly.

CHAPTER II.

THE TIME OF ROSES.


IN a fortnight's time Steven Lawrence, first on one excuse, then another, had become an almost daily visitor at the Dene. The Squire, retaining his first opinion as to the real object of Steven's visits, was always ready to greet him with friendly heartiness; and at the end of three days managed to let him know the amount of Dot's marriage portion. Mrs. Hilliard, who, since the French Revolution, had passed through three or four new phases of romantic hallucination, seemed still disposed to make the yeoman's picturesque person a peg on which to hang the fabric of her harmless dreams. Dora Fane treated him with the sisterly familiarity which from the first she had contrived to establish between them; a familiarity compromising herself in nothing, thought Dot; but which,

at the first inevitable moment of rebound—the first moment when Kate's caprice should have past—might ripen just into whatever feeling she herself chose. And Katharine? For the first time in her life Katharine felt that she was being drawn along by an influence stronger far than coquetry or love of conquest; an influence alien altogether to her own vanity; sweet as the young June sun above her head, and irresistible as it was sweet.

A dream, a dream! she would say to herself a dozen times a day. Steven Lawrence in his heart cared, must care, for Dot, and would one day marry her, as surely as she cared for, and would marry Lord Petres. If she looked forward to his coming it was for Dot's sake; if she found a new, bright pleasure in walking beside him in this glad summer weather, it was merely because Steven himself was new and bright; unlike all the other human beings of her experience. "A beautiful savage," she had called him, extenuating his misdeeds to her conscience on that first evening of their meeting in London; "a creature outside the pale of all conventionalities whatsoever, and to be treated like no other man:" and in this same spirit—so she strove to assure herself—she still regarded

him. Dot was fortunate, very. The happiest hour, she thought, in her own life would be that in which she would see her cousin (the foolish prejudices of rank laid aside) become the legitimate owner of a heart simple and strong as Steven's. And in the meantime—in the meantime the fields were blossoming and the thrushes singing, and Steven's face and voice and mute adoration for ever present at her side!

Not one directly disloyal feeling had, as yet, stirred in Katharine Fane's breast. To have refrained from encouraging Steven simply because she suspected him of liking her a little too well for his own peace, had been to run counter to every old instinct, every old habit of her nature. A great many men besides this one had professed to be in despair about her during the last three years; and she had smiled at first upon them all, then frowned—when their despair became inconveniently definite—then smiled again; and never seen broken hearts or serious ruin of any sort ensue from her cruelty. It would be just the same now. Steven Lawrence had come home from America prepared to love and marry Dora Fane; and of course, but for the foolish mistake of the photograph, the love-story



would have gone on in its appointed course ; most likely have arrived at its last stage by this time. That it would all come right in the end there could be no doubt. It was not as forward, perhaps, as she had thought on that first evening when Steven dined at the Dene ; but Dot for certain was growing to like him ; never laughed when he was absent at his savage ways and want of polish, or of kid gloves ; never mentioned Mr. Clarendon Whyte now. In another fortnight, unless east wind returned, Lord Petres was coming over from Paris to visit them ; probably to settle upon the time of their marriage ; and then, thought Katharine, all this pleasant pastoral interlude, of which Steven was the hero, would be over. She was not quite sure that when the time came she would be able to resign the poor fellow's worship without some pangs of regret : not quite sure that her own life would not seem somewhat blank on the day when she would be obliged, distinctly and for ever, to look upon him coldly. That she could be cutting him off from all his old peace ; that she could be ruining his life, his prospects, his character, for her selfish pastime ; Katharine Fane no more dreamed than a child who grasps a butterfly and laughs with delight at the

coloured dust it leaves upon its fingers, dreams of the butterfly's real position in the game.

Perhaps a woman whose experience in the matter of love has been confined to London drawing-rooms may be excused, on the score of ignorance, for somewhat underrating men's capabilities for sentimental suffering.

The early roses had blown and fallen; the varied tints of hedge-row and coppice were changing fast into the deep-hued monotone of midsummer; and at length the day came when Lord Petres was to arrive at the Dene. It was such weather as makes you feel it a sin to stay half an hour together in the house; warm, unclouded weather, with cool winds stirring from the west, with freshness of recent rains making the green world sweet; and Katharine, who had been running restlessly about her flower-garden all the morning, declared her intention, immediately after lunch, of paying a round of visits to her poor people that afternoon.

"My dear Kate, *do* you forget who is coming?" cried Mrs. Dering, who had arrived the night before on a three days' visit to her mother. "You are so sunburnt already, and—just suppose Lord Petres should be here before you are back!"

“He would not die of despair, I hope,” said Katharine, putting on her hat; “I haven’t visited my people for more than a week, and to-morrow I must stay at home—at least, I suppose so—and the next day as well. Good-bye, Arabella. Give my love to Lord Petres, if you see him before I do!” And ten minutes later she was singing as she walked along through the green corn-fields: wondering whether it was the thought of seeing her lover that made her heart so light, then—with a sigh, and breaking down abruptly in her song—whether next June, whether any June, would ever be as full of sweetness to her as this that had newly fled.

Miss Fane’s “people” were scattered far and wide over the straggling parish of Clithero, and by the time all her visits were paid the sun was already in the west. Once upon a time, in the true spirit of sectarianism, Katharine had laid it down as an axiom that she would never enter the cottage of a dissenter. Only church-people ought to be relieved at all, she said sternly (in theory); and among church-people only those who were members of the church *in earnest*. But somehow this rule of hers did not wear; somehow, when she got abroad among the

poor, poverty, sickness, a brood of tiny children—want, weakness, pain, and not orthodoxy—were the voices which ever cried aloud to this staunch churchwoman's heart. "It's very easy at home to talk of those who ought to be helped!" she said, when the Squire teased her once about the falling off of her principles, and the especially latitudinarian character of a family of her dearest protégés; "but when you see people face to face, and they are sick and hungry, and miserable, how can you remember religion—I mean difference of religion? As soon as Jim Neele has got a boat again, and when the children are up from the fever, I'll begin to talk to them seriously about never coming to church."

So to-day, after duly visiting all her church-people, the cottage which Katharine kept for the last, and at which she knew her visit from predeliction would be the longest, was that of this very Jim Neele; a fisherman of lax theological tenets—Shilohite rather than churchman, when he remembered to go to any place of worship at all—with a poor, clean, over-worked wife and six children, all miraculously near to each other in size, and the oftenest-washed, freshest-cheeked little brood to be seen in the parish.

Poor Mrs. Neele, as usual, was looking

utterly children-worn and meek and hollow-eyed; with her arms up to the elbows in soap-suds, and two or three small boys and girls winding themselves tightly up in the skirts of her patched cotton gown. So, after some friendly talk about Jim and the prospects of mackerel, and Lizzie Jane's teeth; and when something from the visitor's ready purse had made the worn mother's face brighten beautifully; Katharine proposed that she should take off Dan and the baby (really the last baby but one; there was always in the Neele family a pink morsel lying asleep in the cradle, but too indefinite as yet to be taken into calculation) with her for a walk upon the waste. "Just to get them out of your way, Mrs. Neele," said Katharine, in the courteous unpatronising way that made all these people love her: rough independent fisher-people who would have tolerated no fine lady with tracts and good advice inside their doors. "Please don't look frightened," she added, "I shall take the greatest care of them, and bring them back in an hour, when you have done washing, and it's time for me to return home."

The waste was a long strip of sea-board land that ran, broken at intervals by the seamen's narrow strips of garden, from one

end to the other of the parish. Land too arid to yield anything beyond coarse scant grass, musk-thistles, and sea convolvulus—just sufficient food for the donkeys and goats that browsed there; but amidst whose sandy undulations it was pleasant, on a July day, to sit and watch the tide break on the distant rocks; with the faint line of Essex coast for background, and the broad arch of summer blue above your head. A favorite resting-place of “lady’s,” as little Dan Neele knew; and a place where sweeties were given to appearing miraculously on the ground beside “lady” as she sat. So shouldering Katharine’s parasol in a style learnt from the coast-guardsmen, and with a great cotton sun-bonnet of his mother’s nearly covering his entire figure, Dan marched on, as fast as his three-year-old legs could carry him, with Miss Fane bearing a stout baby girl of eighteen months aloft in her arms behind.

She chose a spot for their halting-place where there were plenty of yellow dandelions at hand for Dan to pick, and a small croft or hollow of dry white sand in which the baby could sit and paddle with her hands and feet, or crow at the spikes of the sea-pinks that broke off short in her fingers

when she tried to pluck them. These two occupations lasted for a considerable time; then Dan's mind suddenly reverting to more exciting pleasures than dandelions, he came up to Miss Fane's side, threw down his flowers in a heap, and thrusting a nut-brown fist into her lap, said, "Sweeties!"

"Sweeties? oh no!" cried Katharine, with an accent of deceitful surprise. "No sweeties to-day; Dan, feel in my pocket and see—and baby too. Come, baby and feel!"

A feint by which she won for herself the music—can be any sweeter?—of Dan and baby's surprised gurgling laughter when at length they had pulled out a paper of sugar-candy, peppermint-drops, and other faintly-sticky treasures, and emptied them upon the clean fresh skirt of "lady's" dress. It took another half-hour or so before the refreshment was eaten, for Dan had views on the subject of sweeties not unlike those of his forefathers with respect to jetsam and flotsam, holding that, when fortuitous circumstances had once cast them adrift, either from the mouth or fingers of others, and they lay frosted deep in sand on the ground, they were, by right, the property of the finder—views that his sister resented

by shrill cries, and beating the air with her hands and feet, whenever he attempted to put them into practice. At last peace was restored. The baby alternately addressing remarks in an unknown language to her own bare pink toes or "lady's" watch-chain, sat contentedly on Katharine's lap; Dan, with round eyes, and his little red tongue outstretched upon his chin in admiration, knelt at her side; while, with deft fingers, Miss Fane wove the stalks of his discarded heap of dandelions into chains. "Real chains, Dan: one for you, and one for baby—just like mine." The jeweller's work over, Katharine took out her watch, and finding that it was nearly time for her to return home, bade Dan find a stalk with a "clock" on it, to see if mother wanted him yet?

Dan, who was evidently familiar with this system of time-keeping, started off solemnly on his quest among the sand heaps, shortly returning with a "clock," just in the proper stage of ripe perfection, in his hand; and Katharine, both children watching her, had just blown the last bit of down away from the stalk, when a long shadow passed suddenly between her and the west. She gave a start, and looking up—one hand uplifted to screen the sun from her eyes, the other clasped

round the baby, and with Dan, all eagerness as to what the clock said, sitting firmly on her dress—she saw Steven.

“Mr. Lawrence—appearing in his usual ghostly fashion!” she cried. “What in the world could have brought you here? I’ve lived fifteen years in Clithero, and never met any but small people like this,” laying her hand on Dan’s yellow curls, “on the waste before.”

“I don’t know what brought me here,” said Steven, “except it is that I have a kind of instinct for tracking you out and troubling you, Miss Fane. You’ll begin to feel soon that you can’t get away from me whichever way you walk.”

Then he knelt down, a few paces distant from her, on the ground, and thought Katharine Fane had never looked so beautiful (and so near to him) as she did at this minute in her simple white dress, and with the bright sun shining on her face, and these cottage children in her arms! Something in his expression brought up the blood into Katharine’s cheeks, and, setting the baby hastily on the sand again, she told Dan to play with her. “And—and which would you call my shortest way home, Mr. Lawrence?”—a palpable attempt at finding conversa-

tion. Katharine knew every pathway, every turning, among the fields for miles around. "Straight along by the shore, or through Elliot's hop-garden? Lord Petres is coming by the five o'clock train, you know, and I must be home in time to meet him if I can."

"The shortest way," said Steven, "is neither by the coast nor by Elliot's hop-garden, but through a corner of Ashcot. You should turn to the right just by the two poplars yonder, and go straight across the Five Acres into the London Road. I'll speak the truth," he went on after a moment: "I was working in the Five Acres half an hour ago, and it wasn't accident at all that brought me here. I saw a white gown and yellow umbrella, and knew it must be you, so I came."

"A white gown and yellow umbrella," cried Katharine, laughing. "I think I had better leave off this Japanese style of dress, if it makes me a landmark for the whole county round. Why, Ashcot must be a mile off, at least?"

"Not that, I think," said Steven; "but I have very good sight at all times, and of course I should know you at any distance."

"I wonder whether that is flattering to me individually," said Katharine, "or only a

natural result of wearing yellow umbrellas and white gowns? I don't know how it is," she added, "but you and I can never speak to one another for two minutes without getting on the subject of compliments. Now to-day—you won't be very much surprised, I dare say—but I am going to say something the reverse of complimentary to you to-day."

"Something true, I hope?" said Steven, quickly. "That is all I care about. Whatever you say, you know I shall believe you."

"You may perfectly believe in this. It is—oh, Mr. Lawrence!" cried Katharine, speaking in the quick eager way that, acted or unacted, was so irresistible in her, "it is to say *how* it pains me when I think of your keeping up so much bad feeling towards Dawes! Half the people in the parish have been talking to me about it to-day. When first you told us what you had done I thought you hard, horribly hard—I don't mind saying so. I never liked you so little as when I heard you speak quietly of having turned the wretched man out of Ashcot, and now——"

"Now, Miss Fane?"

"Oh, Mr. Lawrence, I can't tell you how much better I should think of you if you

would only make amends for your harshness ! take Dawes back upon your farm, or, if that cannot be, try at least to do something for him with others. They say no one will give him work—that he is almost in want already. Character, remember, to a labouring man means bread.”

“And dishonesty means dishonesty,” said Steven, promptly. “I acted, as I must always act, up to my own narrow idea of justice, and by such light as I possess, and I should be worse than weak to go back from my own deed now. If Dawes was dishonest he has no right to my help ; if he was not, I had no right to turn him off as I did. There’s not much constancy in me,” he added, “either for evil or for good—good especially ; but, even with you bidding me, I couldn’t bring myself to treat a rogue like an honest man.”

“Not much constancy in you ?” said Katharine, looking up suddenly to his face. “I should have said the very reverse. I should have said inconstancy at least would never be one of your sins.”

Her lip quivered ; her eyes sank down, half abashed, from his ; and for an instant a wild impulse crossed Steven to tell her, then and there, of his passion, and receive his

death-sentence from her lips. He had just reason enough left to keep silent and deliberate for a minute or two; by this time Katharine was speaking again, and the sound of her voice checked back his madness this time, as the touch of a cool hand checks back for a moment a sick man's fever.

"Yes, indeed, I have credited you hitherto with the rare quality of fidelity," she said. "Don't you remember at the opera I laughed at you for having brought back such a worn-out virtue to the regions of civilization?"

"I remember," said Steven. "You laughed at my primitive virtue, as you called it, when I said I had no wish to throw myself at the feet of any woman living, save one—and she was not a play actress. 'Tis in ruling my own life, Miss Fane, that I am without steadfastness. I believe—I know," added poor Steven, as simply and humbly as a child, "that where my heart was set I could never change. Better for me, you would say, if I could!"

It was the nearest thing to a positive declaration that Katharine had been forced to hear from him; for ever since that night upon the terrace, and while they had daily met alone, and upon the most friendly terms,

Steven had as yet jealously guarded his lips from uttering a syllable that could hurry on the fulfilment of his doom. She played somewhat nervously with the children's heap of flower-stalks that lay beside her; took out her watch, and returned it to her belt without in the least seeing to what hour the hands pointed; then began making irrelevant remarks to Dan, who all this time had been sitting, his eyes first turned to one speaker then the other, and still holding the "clock" that Miss Fane had dropped when Steven appeared.

"You are looking very wise, Dan. I wonder what you're thinking of—sweeties in perspective, or what?"

"What do ze clock say?" answered Dan, holding up his dandelion stalk, and not diverted even by the word "sweeties" from his interest in the mysterious work of divination that had been interrupted by Steven.

"Oh," said Katharine, "you have not forgotten that yet, haven't you, Dan? Well, give the clock to me then, and I'll tell you. We had got to five, six, you know; now, 'seven, eight; it's very late.' Ah, the clock tells Dan he must make haste home to mother, and that some one from a great way

off—some one Dan loves very much—will be home to-night.”

Dan received the intelligence with the perfect good faith of his age; thought over it for a minute or two in silence; then, looking up with his big blue eyes into Katharine’s face, said gravely, “and what do ze clock say to lady?”

Here, thought Katharine, with a sudden inspiration of pity, was a great occasion for her to say something “definite” to Steven: something reminding him unmistakably of Lord Petres, and the position in which Lord Petres stood towards herself, yet worded (for Dan’s comprehension) in phrase so gentle, so kindly as to put the poor fellow out of his misery painlessly. Painlessly! did not the Frenchman who invented it use some such expression when he first described the beneficent qualities of the guillotine?

“The clock says to lady, Dan, that she must go home quick, because——”

“No, no,” interrupted Dan, “seven, eight.”

“Oh, you young rogue! how children always will insist upon every syllable being repeated to them verbatim—‘seven, eight, getting late.’ Well, the clock says to lady

that she must go home quick, and that some one from a great way off will be home to-night——”

“Some one lady loves very much,” interposed Dan, not in a tone of interrogation, but simply as if he was setting Miss Fane straight in her lesson.

“Yes, Dan, quite right !” and Katharine rose hastily to her feet, while a blush, born more than half of guilt, dyed her face and throat. “Some one that lady loves. Poor little Dan !” laying her hand on the child’s shoulder, “what home-truths children speak sometimes in their simplicity, Mr. Lawrence !”

Mr. Lawrence answered never a word, but walked on in silence at Miss Fane’s side, or rather a step or two in advance of her, towards the Neele’s cottage, where the mother stood, surrounded by her other children, and looking out anxiously for Dan and the baby at the door. Katharine of course had to talk to her for a few minutes, and be thanked for her goodness in being troubled with that “good-for-nothing Dan ;” and while she was doing so Steven walked slowly on twenty or thirty yards up the lane.

He stopped at the turn beside the poplars that led to Ashcot, and when Miss Fane

came up took off his hat, and wished her good morning.

"Good morning?" cried Katharine. "Oh, yes; I had forgotten. Our paths lie apart here if I go by the shore, which I believe is my best way. Mr. Lawrence," offering him her hand, "I hope you will come over to the Dene soon? I know Lord Petres would like to see you."

"Thank you, Miss Fane."

"To-morrow do you think you could come?"

"To-morrow I shall finish cutting the grass, such as it is, in the Five Acres," said Steven. "Besides, you will have plenty to think of without being troubled by me."

"But in the evening?" she pleaded; "when the busy part of the day is over?"

All this time he had forgotten to take her hand; and something in the blank look of his face as he stood there before her touched Katharine to the quick. Even while honour bade her trifle with him no longer, while honour bade her remember her allegiance to Lord Petres, it went so desperately against her vanity to have to surrender Steven's adoration; went so sharply against every better womanly feeling of her heart to have to witness Steven's pain. Besides, putting herself

altogether aside, was she not bound, for Dora's sake, to make him feel that the same friendly welcome would await him at the Dene, whether richer, better-born friends were there or not? "We are going, I believe, to have a terrible solemnity in the shape of a dinner-party to-morrow. Lord Haverstock and the rector are coming, I think; but—but I am sure Dora and I will make our escape from the dining-room as early as we can, and get out of doors. So if you thought you *could* come round about eight o'clock as usual."

Lord Petres had arrived, dinner had begun before Katharine reached home; and when she appeared at table, still in her morning dress and with a bunch of wild roses at her waistbelt, the only explanation she could give of herself was that she had been visiting the poor people along the waste, and "got lost" on her way home.

"Lost!" cried Mr. Hilliard, opening his eyes wide; "however could you get lost, Kate, and the road along the coast as straight as a die?"

"Why, you see I took a short cut through Ashcot, papa," said Katharine, flinching, she knew not why, under Mrs. Dering's eyes.

“Steven Lawrence met me and showed me the way, and—and I don’t think it was a short cut after all.”

“I suppose you have been botanising, Kate dear,” said Mrs. Dering, glancing sharply at Katharine’s flowers. “You know you always forget time and dinner and everything else when you are weed-hunting.”

Lord Petres smiled his accustomed placid smile, and went on with his soup.

CHAPTER III.

A HONEYMOON IN TANGIERS.

IT was not without a purpose that Mrs. Dering had voluntarily come down for three days to the country and to her relations during the height of the London season. To say that she believed a sister of hers could stoop so low as to break her faith with a man in the position of Lord Petres would be unjust. Still, a certain tone in Katharine's letters of late, a tone of open defiant exaltation of the country and simple country life over London, had—with hints gathered from other members of the family as to Steven's daily presence at the Dene—been sufficient to impress on a woman of Mrs. Dering's principles the wisdom of allowing her sister's engagement to lag no longer. What, indeed, were they waiting for? Would Lord Petres grow fonder of the thought of matrimony, or Katharine fonder of him, by all this delay? Was it dignified to allow the marriage to be

put off thus from one year's end to another ? As poor Lord Petres' health was so uncertain, why not fix for the wedding to take place early in the coming autumn, and then let them go off to Italy, Algeria, or any other climate best suited to the bridegroom's lungs for the winter ?

So argued Mrs. Dering in a solemn after-dinner conclave with the Squire and her mother, held in Mrs. Hilliard's dressing-room ; further urging, as a first practical step in the right direction, that the Squire should have an interview with Lord Petres, as early next morning as he should be visible, on the hitherto neglected subject of settlements. It could be done without consulting Katharine at all. Girls, naturally, were too romantic ever to bear the mention of money, said Mrs. Dering ; looking back, no doubt, to the romantic period of her own life, when she was engaged to General Dering. Let the Squire consult with Lord Petres about everything : settlements, pin-money, the month in which the marriage should take place, their plans for the winter ; then let Katharine be told quietly of the result. Mrs. Dering believed dear Kate would be happier when she knew that matters were definitely settled. Mrs. Dering had observed that Kate


looked decidedly pale at dinner to-day, and could not feel sure that the long engagement was not really beginning to tell upon the poor child's spirits.

It was long before Mr. Hilliard could be brought into accepting the rôle proposed for him. There had never been much cordiality between his eldest step-daughter and the straightforward, warm-hearted Squire; and that Arabella proposed a thing was generally reason enough, *per se*, for Mr. Hilliard to turn obstinate on the instant. He never had any opinion, he said, of this bringing a man up to book. Mrs. Dering looked her quiet indignation at the vulgarity of the phrase. When people wanted to get married, they would *get* married: you might be quite sure about that. It was much fitter Lord Petres should come to him, then he to Lord Petres, on the subject of settlements. Kate had a good many years of youth before her, and, thank God, wasn't tired of her home yet! Let her have plenty of time to think twice before marrying Lord Petres: "a good enough man in his way, no doubt," said the Squire, jumping up, and waxing hotter and hotter at the sound of his own voice, "but not what I ever thought Kate's husband ought to be; and then, if the poor girl has

a mind to change—let her ! Better change before than after, Arabella, is what I say in these matters.”

Arabella was silent. Ten years of marriage had taught Mrs. Dering how much is to be gained by arguing with a man whose intellect or whose temper is inferior to your own. Mrs. Hilliard, guided by one of the sublime intuitions of folly, burst into a flood of tears, and said she never thought her Richard’s children would be told, before her face, that she had degraded herself by a mercenary second marriage.

The suddenness, the utter injustice of this side attack, was more than the Squire could bear up against. By the time he had sworn that he meant nothing personal when he spoke of mercenary marriages ; that he did not mean Katharine’s would be a mercenary marriage ; that, in fact, he meant nothing whatsoever, but was a monster for having said it ;—by the time the Squire was brought to acknowledge this, he was no longer in a state to dispute any mere matter of detail that might be imposed upon him. Mrs. Dering calmly recapitulated, then wrote down on a slip of paper all that it would behoove him to say : settlements so much ; pin-money so much ; marriage in such a month ;



Algeria for the winter. And at twelve o'clock next day, hot in the flesh and in the spirit alike, poor Mr. Hilliard found himself waiting in the breakfast-room for Lord Petres, to whom he—or rather to whom Mrs. Dering—had already written a premonitory note in the morning.

It was a bright summer's day, dry and warm as August, but Lord Petres' disbelief in English climate and English country houses was too thorough to be shaken by a gleam of accidental sunshine, and when at length he made his appearance, it was in a thick morning coat, buttoned up to the chin, and with a Cashmere scarf round his throat. The Squire, who, for the sake of his visitor, and under Mrs. Dering's orders, was enduring a blazing wood fire (in a thorough draught), ran at once and shut up the windows. "We country people live with a good deal of air about us," he said, pausing before shutting out the last breath of fresh air; "but I suppose you——"

"Thank you, my dear sir; I certainly *do* prefer having as few draughts as possible," said Lord Petres, in his small mild voice. "In warm climates I can live out of doors like the natives, but in England it seems to me the outer air can never be safely breathed

except under the condition of violent bodily exercise, for which, I am sorry to say, I have no strength."

He seated himself beside the fire, warming his thin blue-veined hands, and looking ready for any martyrdom that might be in store for him. The Squire came back to the hearthrug, and began shifting from one foot to another, in utter perplexity as to how he should tell this poor little dyspeptic, melancholy guest of his that he must be married before autumn! If he had only got Arabella's list in his hand, he thought, he might do it. Something of Arabella's delicate tact might be infused into him by the sight of the different items jotted down in her firm, clear handwriting. But, of course, it would never do to show such tangible proof of female tutelage as this; so, after struggling with himself for a minute or two, and getting so red that Lord Petres, who was silently watching him, thought he was going to have a fit of apoplexy—the Nemesis of all the underdone meats such a man must have eaten during his life! the Squire burst, apropos of nothing, into the following question: "And—and when do you talk of the marriage coming off, then, Lord Petres?"

Lord Petres stroked down his small black

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whiskers with his small delicate fingers ; put his head slightly on one side, and surveyed the Squire with feeble wonder. "Marriage !" he repeated, plaintively. "My dear Mr. Hilliard, do I hear you aright?—marriage?"

"Hang the man, and hang everything belonging to him !" thought the Squire, pettishly. "What else should I mean? Yes, Lord Petres, *marriage*. I—I—the fact is, I'm afraid your health isn't what it ought to be, and we thought, perhaps, if you spent the winter in a warmer climate, Tangiers, now—no, that isn't it ! where the deuce was it? well, never mind—that's neither here nor there—a warmer climate, at all events."

A warmer climate. Here was something definite at least : something Arabella had told him ; something inoffensive to Lord Petres, and uncompromising of Kate ; and Mr. Hilliard was determined to stick to it. "Yes, a warmer climate," he repeated, putting his hands behind him, and looking up at the ceiling with the air of a man who knows his duty, and who has every intention of performing it.

"But why Tangiers?" said Lord Petres. "I'm grateful, very, to any one who takes an interest in my miserable state, and any data respecting the sanitary influence of dif-

ferent climates is of value to me, but why Tangiers ?”

“I don’t say that it was Tangiers,” said the Squire; “I’m not up in these invalid places—thank God! England was always a good enough climate for me. As you suffer so at home, even in weather like this, we thought some warmer place would set you up for next winter, and . . . and—in that case—we would see if we couldn’t manage to have the wedding over by autumn.”

Lord Petres sat motionless, slowly opening and shutting his eyes, and looking as if he were conscientiously trying to let the meaning of the extraordinary proposal he had just heard gain egress to his brain. It was evident at last that he had to give up the attempt in despair. “The stupidity that besets me of a morning is not a good sign—not at all a good sign,” he said, shaking his head mournfully. “Bright ascribes it to some abnormal irritation of the pneumogastric nerves, and tells me it is not unfrequently a forerunner of paralysis—which is cheering. Now you will think it incredible when I tell you that I do not yet understand about Tangiers. Is it considered a good climate for persons—to speak frankly, Mr. Hilliard—for persons labouring under a complication of bronchial

and dyspeptic disorders, like mine? and what—you must pardon me still more—is the connection, from a climatic point of view, between Tangiers and marriage?”

“He is a fool,” thought the Squire; “a hopeless, hypochondriacal idiot; and the plainer you speak to such a man the better. My dear Lord Petres, you must be aware that as regards your engagement to Kate, I can have only one feeling?” Lord Petres’ face was as the face of a statue. “I married her mother when the child was little, and I believe I’ve done my duty by her as if she had been my own. Well, Kate’s one-and-twenty now, and sensible enough to judge for herself in the matter of choosing a husband. My opinion has not been asked—no, my opinion has *not* been asked,” said the Squire, rather huskily; “and all I have got to do for poor Kate is a mere matter of business. Her mother and sister seem to think the engagement has lasted long enough, Lord Petres, and—and—they wished me to speak to you about it.”

All Lord Petres’ affectation of stupidity vanished as if by magic. The honest physical evidences of heat and nervousness upon the Squire’s face, his earnest voice, his trembling lip as he spoke of Katharine, appealed

to the blasé little man of the world as no tortuous circumlocution of a mere clever diplomatist, like Mrs. Dering, would ever have done. The good, fussy Squire, was acting, he could see, under orders, and under protest; acting, for very certain, without Kate's knowledge, and not in the smallest degree from any personal eagerness of his own to forward the marriage. From the moment in which Mrs. Dering first let him know that his attentions were serious until the present, Lord Petres had never really swerved for one instant from his loyalty to Katharine. Marriage would be a serious blow to him, he felt; the loss of Duclos a more serious blow still; but Kate was the one woman on earth who could best make up to him for all he would be called upon to sacrifice. Besides, Utopian though he might be in principle, Lord Petres, as I have before said, was perfectly old-fashioned and conservative in the ordering of his own life. He voted with his party in politics; attended the services of the church to which he hereditarily belonged; and had always felt, whatever his theoretic convictions on the subject of marriage, that it would be incumbent upon him, personally to marry before he died. So now, enormously to the Squire's relief, his future stepson rose

up, gave him a friendly little shake of the hand, thanked him for the kind interest he was showing in him, both as regarded his health and his domestic happiness, and expressed the delight it would afford him (seating himself by the fire again, as he said this, and vainly trying to look cheerful) to have a near day fixed for the wedding.

Talk about money followed, in the easiest way in the world. Lord Petres' ideas of settlements were more liberal than anything that Mrs. Dering had bid the Squire stipulate for. So much jointure in the event of his death—to be unaltered by any second marriage of Katharine's; so much pin-money; and Kate's own small fortune (for Katharine was an heiress to the extent of five thousand pounds, left her a year or two ago by her godmother) to be exclusively her own, of course. And radiant with satisfaction at having got over this part of his work so well, the Squire was just noting down some memento of his success in his pocket-book at Lord Petres' side, when Katharine herself, fresh as the morning, and with her arms full of flowers, opened the glass door that led from the breakfast-room to the garden. Her eyes were dazzled still by the bright sunshine in which she had been standing;

and for a moment she walked on, unconscious that she was not alone, and singing under her voice the "*Apparvi alla luce*" that she had last listened to with Steven at the opera.

"Ahem! Kate, my love!" cried the Squire, putting his pocket-book behind him, then dropping it into his pocket with as frightened a feeling as if he had been detected in plotting a forgery. "Why, Kate, you're looking as blooming as your own roses. What—what time is it, my dear?" The consciousness of his guilt made the Squire stammer and turn red.

"What time?" said Katharine, looking quickly, first at Mr. Hilliard's face, then at Lord Petres'. "Well, papa, as the clock is precisely opposite to you, I should think you might tell! It is exactly seventeen minutes and a half to one."

"Seventeen minutes to one!" cried the Squire, seizing up his hat which stood on a side-table, and making a hasty retreat towards the window, "and I promised to see old Elliot at noon! Lord Petres, if you will excuse me, I must run away. If the afternoon is warm enough I wish you would come down and look at my Guernsey heifer—Kate you will know where to find me?"

The moment the lovers were alone Kate tossed down her heap of flowers on the table, and came up to Lord Petres' side. "You are looking worried," she said. "What is the matter? what has papa been saying to you?"

Lord Petres turned his eyes up to Katharine's sweet summer face, and felt a really epicurean regret that he could not be more in love with her. He took her hand, her cool hand round which the scent of carnations and daphnes clung yet, and kissed it. "Mr. Hilliard has been talking to me of a great many things; Tangiers, among the rest. You and I are going to Tangiers, Kate."

"I hope not, Lord Petres."

"We are going there this winter. It is a great climate, Mr. Hilliard tells me, for invalids of my class, and as I refuse to be banished alone, you must just go with me, Katharine!"

"And what will Monsieur Duclos do?"

"Oh, the time has past for thinking of Duclos," answered Lord Petres. "As our friend Lawrence says,—are there no other French cooks to be had in the world besides Duclos?"

Something in the seriousness of his face or the mention of Steven, or both, made Katharine change colour. "What *has* papa

been talking about?" she cried hastily. "Now, I insist upon knowing!"

"We have been talking about fixing our wedding-day, Kate," and all this time Lord Petres held her hand in his. "These long delays are very well for you, but at my age, and in my precarious state, I naturally grudge every month which—"

"Enables Duclos to remain with you?" interrupted Katharine, as Lord Petres' inability to speak anything but the truth made him hesitate. "I know quite well what all this means, Lord Petres! Bella has been giving us her advice. You and papa, indeed! As if you are not, both of you, much too fond of me to originate such a cabal! Bella, because her own engagement was a short one, thinks she is to impose her example upon us. She shall do no such thing. Courtship, all poets and novel-writers agree, is the best part of life; then I say let the best part be eked out as long as possible. Tangiers, too! You and I in Tangiers!"

Katharine Fane's laugh had never sounded so musical as it did at this moment to Lord Petres' ears. The breaking-up of his life, the departure of Duclos, all seemed reprieved indefinitely to him by the ring of that girlish, heart-whole laugh. "You are very cruel!" he

said. "After leaving Paris in the pleasantest June I ever saw there, after risking my health by travelling about in this inclement climate——"

"And after hoping to go, as a married man, to Tangiers, to be sentenced to a longer term of bachelor misery in Paris and London? Oh, Lord Petres, I am so sorry for you!"

"Show it, Kate."

"How?"

He drew her to his side, and—for about the third time since their engagement—touched her cheek with his pale lips. Mrs. Dering, who was passing before the window, happened just then to look in upon them; and a hot thrill of shame and indignation and self-contempt passed suddenly through Katharine's heart.

Until this moment she had never fully and thoroughly realised that the play had a meaning in it: that little Lord Petres would one day be Katharine Fane's husband!

CHAPTER IV.

COFFEE ON THE TERRACE.

THE dinner-party {that evening was not remarkable for its brilliancy, Lord Petres in the course of the afternoon had had his hand pressed by Mrs. Dering with a sisterly warmth that he could not hide from himself was fraught with cruellest significance for the future; he had also been conducted through long grass to see the Squire's heifers, and had got his feet damp; and throughout the last twenty-four hours had partaken only of nourishment prepared by a "good plain" English cook. Could it be wondered at if Lord Petres' eyes looked more glassy, his white face more resigned and melancholy than usual, during the entire festivity—a festivity which, like the death-feasts of the Indians, was being celebrated, he knew, in mocking honour of himself, the victim destined hereafter for immolation. Katharine, who looked mortally wearied

with everybody, sat between her lover and the rector, saying yes and no at hazard, and as the evening wore on giving many furtive glances across the lawn towards the terrace; the point where Steven Lawrence was accustomed at this hour of sunset to appear. Mrs. Dering talked, and talked well, as usual; she was a woman whose special vocation it was to supply admirable small talk under all accidents or changes of human life; but with the best will in the world, one person, unsupported,] can scarcely furnish adequate conversation for a dinner-party of seven. The rector, piqued at the onset of dinner by Katharine's treatment of one of his best stories, confined himself silently to eating and drinking for the remainder of the meal; and Lord Haverstock (a tall, indefinitely-coloured creature, aquiline-nosed, good-humoured eyed, and with an inch and a half of forehead) was so horribly frightened at finding himself next to Dot; the poor boy was always frightened to death by every young woman higher in rank than a barmaid; that he never opened his lips except in scared monosyllables from the moment he began his soup until the ladies had left the table.

“Such are little sociable dinners,” said

Katharine, when at length, with her sister and Dot, she had made her escape to the garden. "How intensely stupid it all was! How intensely stupid men are! How wise mamma was to have a headache, and keep in her own room!"

"I don't think it was at all stupid, Kate," said Mrs. Dering. "It just seemed to me one of those pleasant friendly parties where people talk or are silent as they like. How wonderfully good-looking the rector is, and *how* Lord Haverstock has improved!"

Kate gave a little dry laugh. "Improved! What can Lord Haverstock have been like in his former state, if in his present one he is improved? Now suppose he wasn't Lord Haverstock at all, but a son of Mills the horse-dealer, what should we say of him, I wonder, with his horsey look and slang expressions, when he does open his lips—and his awkwardness and stupidity?"

Mrs. Dering was too wise, and too well pleased with the success of her own diplomacy, to attempt to contradict any of Katharine's radical opinions to-night. "Poor Lord Haverstock! he is certainly not over-brilliant or over-handsome; but how charming your new rector is! I had not seen him before. No wonder he has made you

a convert to Angelicanism, Katharine!"

"If he is always as eloquent as he was to-day, I should think his life would be spent in making converts," said Katharine. "*Did* he speak a dozen words from the beginning of dinner till its close?"

"Well, my opinion is that everybody was so silent because they had a kind of wedding-breakfast cloud hanging over them!" cried Dot incisively. "The coming event begins to cast its shadow before. As I looked at you, Kate, sitting in your white dress at Lord Petres' side I could quite have imagined that we were assisting already at the marriage feast."

"That I can very well believe," said Katharine, quietly. "Lord Petres looked miserable enough, even for a bridegroom, I am sure. I must tell him seriously by and by, that I have no more intention of being married now than I ever had. Something besides the country and the bad cooking is telling on the poor little fellow's spirits, I am sure."

Mrs. Dering laughed, and affected to treat this remark of her sister's as a pleasantry; but a few minutes later she put her hand within Katharine's arm, and managed to get her away to the terrace-walk, out of Dot's

hearing. "I have not had an opportunity to speak to you before, Kate," she whispered. "How glad, how very glad I am, dearest, to think that everything is settled!"

"Settled? as regards what, Bella?"

"Ah, don't jest, Katharine, when you are alone with me—settled as regards your approaching marriage! Lord Petres spoke to papa this morning, and wants it to be very soon, and was most liberal—but we won't even talk of that. Come Kate," said Mrs. Dering, affectionately, "don't pretend to me that you and Lord Petres are not thoroughly d'accord in everything."

"I should say," said Katharine, speaking slowly and with deliberation, "that Lord Petres and I are 'd'accord,' as you call it, in nothing. Oh, I know what you would remind me of," she cried, as Mrs. Dering was about to interrupt her, and with an almost painful blush rising over her face. "You looked in through the window to-day, and you saw that Lord Petres kissed me; I believe it was the second time he ever did so, Bella! Some great ceremonial of the kind took place when we were first told that we were engaged, and I didn't mind it much then. I never even thought of love in those days. I mean, I mean—oh, dear me,"

and she turned and looked wistfully into her sister's face; "I don't think I ever *can* marry Lord Petres!"

Whatever Mrs. Dering felt, she was, outwardly, thorough mistress of the situation. "All girls think much the same," she answered soothingly. "I am sure I thought a dozen, a hundred times, before I married General Dering, that I did not really care enough for him, yet you see how happy I am, Kate!"

"I am a very different woman to you, Bella."

"You are a woman," said Mrs. Dering, "exactly suited to the position in which Lord Petres can place you. Let us talk sense, not sentiment, Kate! You are a woman fond of society, and of shining there, fond of London, fond, in a restricted sense, of the country; fond of everything cultivated and refined in life; and all this can be given through money alone. Besides, Katharine," she added gravely, "although it is a subject in which my conscience forbids me to sympathise, I cannot but feel that your holding, in your heart, the religious opinions which Lord Petres professes openly, is an immense tie to bind you together. If I could think, if I could hope," cried Mrs. Dering, "that there

was a chance of your abandoning what I must ever hold to be Romish error, I should feel differently. But I do not think this. I believe you sincere in your religion, as you are in everything else, Kate, and I am sufficiently free from narrow-mindedness to rejoice that you are to marry a Catholic. What chance of earthly happiness can there be," said Mrs. Dering, solemnly, "unless married people think alike on the sacred subject that outweighs all others?"

Every word in this long speech was well chosen. Katharine knew that she did like society, and shining in society; London, country, and everything else that money could give. Still, had Mrs. Dering stopped here, her arguments had been insufficient. What were these things worth, Katharine would have asked, when they came to be weighed against the sweet liberty which she must surrender to gain them? But the vision of returning to the church of her predilection and her birth—of being in a position to give that faith substantial support—was one that during the last eighteen months had lain very near to Katharine Fane's heart.

A child of seven when her mother remarried (and from indolence, and the dis-

tance of the Dene from a Roman Catholic chapel, and the love of being a martyr, combined, went over to the Squire's faith), Katharine, a stout little papist already, had obstinately rebelled from the first against exchanging her blue rosary, and pretty prayers to the Virgin, for Mrs. Trimmer and the church catechism as broken up and made easy by Pinnock. Clithero church and its services seemed hideous and bare, indeed, after the glittering convent chapel in which the child had been accustomed to hear mass at York : the chapel with windows that cast rainbow pictures upon an inlaid floor ; and paintings of Mother and Child, and soft-eyed saints around the walls ; and crucifix and snow-white lilies upon the altar ; and even the roof covered with blue clouds and gilded stars and angel faces — always specially smiling down on little Kate.

“ I like my new papa, and I like my pony,” the child said, trying to be just ; “ but I don't like being a Protestant. I like chapel because they sing, and have pictures, and swing incense there. I like to watch the serving boys ; I like to see the silver cross and the little pink roses on Father Austin's back, and I *hate* Clithero church, and the ugly old man in a white gown ! And when

I am a woman I'll go to chapel again like my own papa did."

Time, and the irresistible weight of example, made the child a Protestant of course ; that is to say, she fretted after the blue beads no more ; and she said (aloud) the formulas she was taught to say, and did not behave worse than other children of her age at the parish church. Arabella, who even at this early age was a young person swayed by her reason rather than emotions, had been brought without much difficulty to see that living in a Protestant neighbourhood, and under the roof of a Protestant stepfather, the tenets of Popery were errors that it was good taste for her to abjure. And whatever Arabella, at her advanced time of life, and with her superior wisdom did, Kate, poor little soul ! felt could not be very wrong for her to do likewise. Still, the poetry, the fragrance of the old religion was never really crushed out from her memory. If her new home, instead of being the Dene, had been Ashcot ; if the worship, which was to replace the glitter and sweet incense and sweet music of the mass had been the worship of Shiloh, a very few months would probably have sufficed to turn Katharine into just as staunch a Wesleyan as she had once been a papist. She was a

warm, passionate-natured little creature; craving to love, craving to be loved in return by men and women, but also by the good saints and by heaven! And, notwithstanding their lack of outside beauty, the familiar hymns, the homely services of Shiloh had, I think, sufficient real human heartiness in them to have filled the simple measure of a child's soul.

As it was, the religion they told her to give up was replaced—I may say it boldly—by none. The Squire's whole kindly life was, in truth, religion put into practice; and to him, instinct-guided, Kate clung. But the Squire was a man darkly ignorant as to theological differences. A papist, a unitarian, a quaker, might each, without detriment to his belief, have had Mr. Hilliard for an associate. He had taken very little part in his wife's conversion; none at all in the hiding away of Kate's blue beads. The Church of England was the faith into which he himself had been born, and in which he meant to die; and he went regularly to church, and repeated the responses, and listened (a little beyond the text) to the sermon on Sunday; and dined at two o'clock for the sake of the servants; and never broke the sanctity of the day otherwise than by furtively taking

his long spud and digging up weeds in retired parts of the garden of an afternoon. From Monday morning till Saturday night he thought of nothing higher than his mangels and heifers, and improving his land, and the condition of the poor who lived on it, with such other narrow interests and employments as immediately belonged to his narrow groove of life. And, young as she was, little Kate soon felt that the Squire, except in sickness, regarded the mention of any sacred name or subject on a week day as a sort of sacrilege.

Once and once only, they were very happy picking peas together in the kitchen garden, she had asked him if he "understood why" the cock should have crowed just at the right time to reprove St. Peter?

"I understand nothing, my dear—not as much as why the peas grow sideways in the pods," said the Squire. "What you and I have got to mind, Kate, is, to do our duty at all times, and believe what the parson tells us in church of a Sunday."

And this answer had been sufficient to warn the child for ever off all controversial or doctrinal ground, as far as her stepfather was concerned.

From her mother the only allusion she

ever heard to a life higher than one of medicine-taking and novel-reading, was when Mrs. Hilliard would plaintively murmur of how she had given up her own personal welfare, temporal and eternal, for her children's sake. A statement which, coming from a human creature lying on a luxurious sofa, and with as much calf's foot jelly as she chose to eat at her side, was too mysterious and awful to bear much real significance to a child's mind. Arabella, until her marriage, never exhibited any fruits of Protestant belief more convincing than the possession of a purple velvet church-service, which Kate was not allowed to touch; and Dot, when Dot appeared on the scene, was frankly and without affectation a pagan.

"You fret to be Catholique once more?" Dora had said in the early days of her arrival, and when Kate, relying on her cousin's childish appearance for sympathy, had bared to her the state of her conscience. "Bah! they are one so good as ze other. Catholique in Paris—Protestant in England! Go—what matters it?"

These had been the spiritual influences of Katharine's life; the influences which had so signally failed to efface the convent chapel with its gilded shrine and snow-white lilies,

its solemn mass and plaintive nun-chanted Litanies, from her heart!


Into the intrinsic truth or error of conflicting creeds she had, I must confess, not striven to penetrate very far. Katharine Fane was not what many people call "intellectual," and her active out-of-door habits—varied latterly by a few weeks' unresting London excitement during the season—left her little time for theological, or, indeed, for deep studies of any kind. Her ideal of life had always been that it should be thoroughly enjoyable and picturesque; a life in which everybody, rich and poor, should love Katharine Fane! a life made up of flowers and sunshine; pictures, music, pretty things of all sorts; with a picturesque religion (the old church seemed such an one to her) to correspond. And until the last few weeks the possibility of existence yielding more than such facile inch-deep happiness, had never troubled Katharine's imagination. She was handsome and young, and could make everybody think as she liked; and when she was Lady Petres she would restore the old Catholic chapel down at Eccleston, and go back openly to the church herself, and have a chaplain with a pathetic voice to say mass, and convert all the Protestant poor on her

husband's estates, and found a convent in which Dot, if she did not marry, might take refuge. This had been her dream; this, as Mrs. Dering well knew, was the rock of strength on which Katharine's fidelity to her engagement rested.

"You know that what I say is true, Kate. You know that for every reason your marriage with Lord Petres will be an excellent one—and if you would only listen to me, if you would only have a little more faith in my experience, you would not delay your engagement too long. Dora, from what she tells me, is likely to be married before the winter, and I really do not see what but perversity can make you wish to remain at home after she is gone."

Katharine turned her head impatiently aside from her sister. Far away across the purple bay she could see a dark spot upon the water; and her heart told her that it was Steven's boat.

"Yes," went on Mrs. Dering, in her measured voice, "there is, I suppose, no longer any doubt about it. The young man is here, Dora says, every day of his life; and, of course, all that we can do now is to bear the misalliance with the best grace possible. What do you say, Kate?"



"I say nothing, Bella. I'm stupid, and out of spirits, I think—at all events, I don't mean to talk about any more love affairs, if I can help it, to-night."

"What, not when your favourite Steven is the hero? Surely you have not lost your interest in him already, dear Katharine."

Dear Katharine continued silently to watch the boat and the figure in it as both grew gradually more and more distinct; and Mrs. Dering, after vainly waiting some minutes for a reply, took herself off in despair to Dot, who, very sylvan-looking in a pale green muslin dress, and with a natural rose in her short hair, was arranging cups and saucers on a rustic table at the other end of the terrace.

"It has taken ten years to make Uncle Frank consent to have coffee out of doors in hot weather;" said Dot, "but I have got my own way about it at last. What is the good of having a garden, and terraces, and natural flowers, I say, unless one uses them? English people declare they like the country—perhaps they do, in a cow-like ruminating fashion—but they certainly don't know how to enjoy it: no, not half as much as the smallest Parisian shopkeeper, who all through the fine season, goes and

drinks his coffee out of doors in the Bois."

"Possibly English people can enjoy the country without eating and drinking out of doors," remarked Mrs. Dering, sententiously. "English people don't pretend, you must remember, to be always turning life into fête-days, like the French—"

"They don't indeed!" interrupted Dora. "The worse for those whose lot it is to live among them!"

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Dering, "when you have a home—a nice little rural home of your own, you will be able to take your coffee out of doors every evening of your life, and play at fête-days, and fancy yourself in France again as much as you like! At all events," she added, "I am glad to think, Dora, that you are beginning to talk of enjoying country pleasures in any form. If, as you tell me, you allow Mr. Steven Lawrence to come here every day of the week, there is not much doubt, I suppose, what your future life is going to be?"

"I allow?" cried Dot, with one of her mocking laughs. "Katharine allows, you mean. I told you Steven Lawrence came here every evening, as regularly as the sun sets, and so he does—but not for me. I never take to myself attentions meant in

reality for others, Bella dear ! At first the poor fellow used to try and find excuses for coming so often. He had a message for the Squire, or the weather was so fine he thought the young ladies would like to go out a bit in his boat, but now he comes daily and with no excuse at all. Comes to see Kate, bien entendu, and Kate alone ; and thinks about as much of me as he does of Zuleika."

"It is impossible he can think of anybody *but* you," said Mrs. Dering, with calm incredulity. "Quite impossible ; from the little I saw of him in town I should judge Steven Lawrence to be a thoroughly sensible young man. He feels shy, no doubt, at first, and addresses himself to Kate rather than you until he can be sure what ground he stands upon."

Dot gave a meaning little shrug of the shoulders by way of reply, and just at this moment the Squire with Lord Haverstock and the rector—all looking as picturesque as men generally do in black suits and white ties—made their appearance on the terrace, followed, after an interval, by Lord Petres, wrapped up as usual, and with his French valet bearing an immense seal-skin rug and a heap of Scotch plaids behind.

"You are quite right to take precautions,

Lord Petres," said Mrs. Dering; Katharine who had slowly sauntered up having asked him if he was going to Siberia. "However fine the weather looks I never believe myself that the evening air is not really damp before August. Thanks," as Lord Petres offered her a share in the seal-skin. "Fond as I am of the country and everything belonging to it, I must confess that I prefer sitting on a good thick fur to the damp ground. Kate, dear, there is room still for you."

"Thank you, Bella," said Katharine, "it makes me quite warm enough to look at you both:" for Mrs. Dering, with fine appreciation of furs in July, had seated herself at her future brother-in-law's side. "In weather like this the colder and damper every thing feels the better I say. Isn't the sea blue to-night, Lord Haverstock? doesn't the very look of it always make you wish you were there?"

The very sound of a lady's voice, propounding a direct question to himself, always startled Lord Haverstock to an extent that made him wish himself in truth at the very bottom of the sea. But feeling that it was an occasion on which something complimentary might be expected of him, the poor boy answered, after shifting about his large hands

and feet in tortures of shyness, that he thought perhaps it was very pleasant here, that is to say, he didn't know, really, whether it was possible for a fellow to be better off than they all were now, but certainly—"

"I have often thought, Miss Fane," said the rector, speaking in the well-trained well-pitched tone that always so fatally reminded Katharine of some one reading aloud out of an improving book; "I have often thought how the view of the sea from your terrace reminds one of bits of the Mediterranean, flowers at one's feet, evergreens growing close down to the water, the smooth blue bay beyond, the distant line of coast which, fancy aiding somewhat, might be Ischia or Capri, the——"

"What, Steven!" interrupted Dot's ringing voice, amidst a little clatter of the coffee cups: "I declare you looked just like the figure in Don Giovanni, rising up suddenly in that spectre-like way from nowhere! Arabella—Mr. Lawrence—Katharine dear, here is Steven."

CHAPTER V.

THE FARM GARDEN.

THE sun, which during the last quarter of an hour, had been hidden behind a bank of low-lying violet cloud, threw out his last ray before setting at this moment ; and the light shone full upon Steven Lawrence's figure, as he walked slowly up to the group of people on the terrace.

He was dressed in his accustomed yeoman fashion ; not in any of the fashionable clothes made for him by Lord Petres' London tailor ; a light velveteen suit, drab gaiters, a coloured handkerchief knotted round his throat, a wide-awake hat, with a bit of clover stuck in its ribbon ; dressed no better, save in the fineness of his linen, than any of the well-to-do workmen or gardeners about the Squire's grounds ; but bearing, thought Katharine, in his handsome face and graceful "savage" mien, far more of nature's unconscious no-

bility than did young Lord Haverstock, or her own poor little pallid lover, or even the Oxford-trained rector, with his ultra air of refinement and artificial self-occupied voice and manner.

She stood silent, actually with a blush—a *blush* upon her cheeks! Mrs. Dering noted, until Steven had shaken hands with the men of the party, and talked for a minute or so to Dora, who began calling him Steven at once—evidently quite ready to exhibit her intimacy with him before the world—then crossed over to the table, and, to Mrs. Dering's growing dissatisfaction, poured out a cup of coffee for him with her own hand.

"Dear Kate is so impulsive!" she whispered; interrupting Lord Petres in some information he was solemnly giving her as to the best way of dressing ortolans. "So good-hearted! Everything she does is done so thoroughly—too thoroughly, perhaps—on the spur of the moment!"

"I thought you were not going to look at me, at all," said Katharine, as she stood at Steven's side. "You spoke to papa, and Lord Petres, and Dora—to every one, in short, but me. What is it like at sea to-night?"

"It is calm but fresh," answered Steven;

"fresher than when I took you and Miss Dora out the other night."

"I have a great mind to propose an adjournment there now," cried Katharine. "It would be a wonderfully pleasant change for everybody, I am sure!" with a little tired sigh.

"The boat would not hold everybody," said Steven, matter of fact as usual. "As I came along, I confess I thought I might tempt you and Miss Dora to come out, but now I see that I am too late."

"Too late! and why too late?" said Katharine, the consciousness that Mrs. Dering was listening to them urging her onward. "As far as I am concerned, I say frankly, I should like nothing better—that is, if some of the others will go too. Dot, what do you say? Will you come out for a row in Mr. Lawrence's boat? Now I am sure you would enjoy it."

But Dot, mindful of the fleeting nature of green muslin, and not wholly forgetful of young Lord Haverstock, had no inclination for boating. She was quite sure there was a swell; decidedly more swell at all events than there had been the other evening, and even then she felt frightened; and perhaps it would get dark suddenly! Nothing she had

such a horror of as being out, en pleine mer, in the dark. So Katharine addressed herself to Mrs. Dering.

"Mr. Lawrence offers to take some of us out in his boat, Bella. There is room, I think, for four. Will you come? No. Then you will, Lord Petres. Oh, indeed you must, the fresh air out in the bay will do you a world of good."

But after talking about marriage settlements in the morning, walking over damp grass to see heifers in the afternoon, and finally dining off a "good plain" English dinner, in commemoration of his own approaching wedding, the eloquence of the most beautiful lips in the world would not have made Lord Petres conclude his day in the country by voluntarily encountering more damp and misery, and discomfort of every kind in a boat.

"I never go on any portion of the Channel, thank you, Kate, except that between Calais and Dover, and then my sufferings are so atrocious that I think on every occasion I cross it will be for the last time. We are the playthings of fate, Mrs. Dering," added Lord Petres, as Mrs. Dering looked duly interested and sympathetic. "I often ask myself by what grim irony was I, with my defective

organization, called into existence now, instead of a hundred years or so hence, when new methods of locomotion will have made steamers and sea-sickness things of the past."

"If new methods of locomotion are to do away with boating," said Katharine, "I, for one, would much sooner live out my poor morsel of existence now. Look at that smooth shining water, Lord Petres; who wouldn't sooner cross it in a trim little yacht at this moment than be impelled across in a monster balloon, or transmitted, perhaps, through a submarine tube like a parcel?"

"I think we are very much better on dry land than in a balloon or a boat either," put in Mrs. Dering; "we can see just as much of the shining water as we like—at a distance, and go into the house as soon as it gets cold."

"And in the meantime are at the height of a most important discussion on ortolans," said Lord Petres, gravely. "Kate, don't let our incapacity for maritime enjoyment keep you on shore. Lawrence will take every care of you, I know, and Mrs. Dering and I are in the middle of a conversation which will occupy us very pleasantly till you return."

Katharine hesitated. "If papa would

come," she said, glancing at the Squire, who, in an eager undertone, was telling Lord Haverstock about the melancholy death of his prize-pig, from which so much had been expected: "Near upon four hundred-weight," Kate overheard him say, in a broken voice, "and gone in a moment, sir! gone like the snuff of a candle;" "but there is not much use in asking him. Papa."

"What, my dear?"

"Will you come with us on the water for an hour or so? Mr. Lawrence has brought his boat round, and I think it would be so cool and pleasant out in the bay."

"Then do you go, by all means, Kate," said Mr. Hilliard, who never troubled his head about chaperons or proprieties, "Lord Haverstock and I are content where we are. Yes, she was near upon four hundredweight, I assure you, and——"

"I believe ninety-nine people out of a hundred detest the sea!" cried Katharine, turning away to Steven. "If I want to go at all, I must go alone. Now, what about the tide? If we start at once, should I be able to get back in half an hour or so without walking ankle-deep across more than a mile of wet sand?"

"The tide has only just turned," said

Steven. "You could be out for an hour—time enough to row to Seymour tower and back—and still get a good landing-place by the Beacon rock."

"Well, then, I make up my mind. I will go!" cried Katharine, resolutely; the more resolutely because her sister's face so plainly bade her stay where she was. "Who will lend me a wrap? Thanks, Bella," as Mrs. Dering, with the worse grace in the world, handed her a plaid from the heap of shawls that lay beside Lord Petres. "Now, Mr. Lawrence, let us start. If any one likes to follow us, so much the better; if not, we go alone."

She walked away with Steven down the terrace. Lord Petres turned his head slowly—being out of doors invariably gave him a stiff neck—and watched them.

"I am sure I've seen a picture like that somewhere," he remarked, with perfect amiability, to Mrs. Dering. "Dark trees; orange sky; grass terrace; sea in the background; principal figures—graceful girl in white dress, looking up at handsome youth attired as a gamekeeper; handsome youth evidently embarrassed in his mind, and walking with his hands behind him at her side."

Mrs. Dering tried to look pleasant. "I

believe I do remember some picture of the kind," she answered: "isn't it poor Queen Mary walking beside one of her jailors at Lochleven?"

"I think not," said Lord Petres. "The picture I speak of is one of modern manners, and the principal figures in it are young persons in the position of lovers. It was called 'Hearts Errant,' or, 'Hearts in Mortemaine,' or some other of those ridiculous names our English artists are so fond of choosing, but it was a very pretty picture, all the same, Mrs. Dering."

Just at this moment the "principal figures" had reached the flight of stone steps which led down from the terrace to the shore. "No one is coming," said Katharine, looking back. "There is Lord Petres watching us," and she kissed her hand to him, "but not in the least meaning to follow; and the rector talking to Dot; and papa still intensely interested in telling poor Lord Haverstock about the pig. Now I am at liberty to enjoy myself. They are all perfectly well amused without us, and I feel I have done nothing inhospitable in leaving them."

She ran down the steps to the cove beneath the Squire's grounds, where Steven's little craft already lay, high and dry, upon the sand.

A few vigorous pulls from his stout arm soon brought the boat to the water's edge, where Katharine got in, and then, wading knee-deep into the sea, Steven pushed the boat off, and jumped lightly into his place at the instant that she floated.

"You don't mind wet feet, I see," said Katharine, the vision of Lord Petres and of his horrors among the damp grass rising involuntarily before her as she spoke. "Oh, how deliciously cool it is here! how good it was of you to come for me! I was afraid when you were so late you had forgotten all about us."

"At first I did mean to stay quiet at home stacking my hay," said Steven. "But of course my wishes got the better of my wisdom in the end, and I came——"

"Luckily for me," interrupted Katharine, a little hastily. "Mr. Lawrence, I think one must come fresh from a very stupid dinner-party in a very hot dining-room to appreciate really and thoroughly such blessed freedom as this! Can silence ever be as golden as when for two mortal hours you have been listening to the wire-drawn conversation of six people all as heartily bored by each other as you were by them?"

"I thought you all seemed to have plenty


to say when I first saw you on the terrace—you and the parson especially,” said Steven, with the look which Katharine understood so well coming round his lips

“The parson! our poor rector!” she answered. “He is so undeniably well-read, and well-mannered, and has such a musical voice, and still—still whatever he says (out of the pulpit) makes me inclined, first to contradict him, next to fall asleep. How singularly few people there are in the world who ever say anything worth listening to—are there not?”

“Lord Petres seems to me a man who would always be worth listening to,” remarked Steven. “Whatever he says would always be new—to my comprehension, at least.”

“Ah yes, Lord Petres, certainly,” said Katharine. “I did not speak of him. You must remember Lord Petres never has anything to say to me when Mrs. Dering is present.”

She leant down her head; its drooping graceful outline showed clear, like an antique bronze, against the yellow sunset; and let one of her hands dip into the transparent water as the steady stroke of Steven’s sculls, helped by the ebbing tide, bore the little boat



fast away from the shore. Neither of them spoke again till they were well out in the bay; then Steven rested on his sculls, and Katharine lifted up her face almost with a start. The sun in these ten minutes had sunk beneath the horizon; the distant plantations of the Dene, the terrace, and the people on the terrace, all had become dusk and indistinct, like the scenery in a dream. The only things, vivid to Miss Fane were Steven's face and the sense that they were alone under this tender flush of sky, and with the sea, beating like one vast heart, murmuring like one vast whisper of love, for their companion.

She faltered a word or two about its being late, then added something, but of a very indistinct and hazy nature, about Mrs. Dering and Lord Petres.

"Mrs. Dering and Lord Petres are well wrapped up in furs, and talking about ortolans," said Steven. His tone was changed, Katharine detected. It was firmer, less pleading than it had ever been with her before. "There is not the slightest need for you to return to them yet. I dare say I shall never ask another favour of you after to-night," he added; "don't refuse to stay out a little longer with me now."

"I—oh, I was only thinking about the tide," said Katharine. "As long as you undertake to put me safely on dry land in half an hour or so it is all right. Look, there is the moon's light coming up behind Seymour tower already, just like a scene at the opera, as Dot says, when she means to be unusually complimentary to nature."

She spoke lightly ; yet there was something in her voice that might have told an acute observer she was not thoroughly at her ease. Steven, however, did not seem to notice it.

"We will keep in the course of Seymour tower still," he said, after a few minutes' steady rowing ; "then drift with the back-current round to the slip at Ashcot. You have never seen my house and garden from the sea, Miss Fane ? Well, I've a fancy to take you there—a fancy that you should walk once round the old garden with me to-night. Will you come ?"

Katharine took out her watch, the hands of which it was already too dark to distinguish. "If I was quite sure about the tide," she began—

"—Oh, I undertake everything about the tide," interrupted Steven, quickly. "I promised to land you at the Beacon rock, and so I will. You will be at many more

dinner-parties," he added, "but such an hour as this may never come to me again, remember, while I live!"

It was a glorious hour; earth, sea, and heaven bathed in such subtle minglement of the hues of day and night as living painter could never be rash enough to imitate. Across the dawning moonrise floated fleecy vapours, sun-tinged from the west; on the western side of Seymour tower, an old Martello fort that could be reached at low spring-tide across the rocks, a deep red glow yet lingered, while its eastern outline was already tipped with silver. Delicate hosts of pearl and crimson covered half the sky. Within shelter of Clithero bay a fleet of fishing-boats lay so motionless that not a ripple broke their long reflections. The polished water rose and fell against the boat with a lazy rippling cadence, just one degree more lulling to the ear than the stillness of perfect calm.

As she looked back across the bay towards home, where darkness was now fast growing in the hollows of the shore, and where the ridge of fir plantations on Clithero hill smote black upon the pale primrose sky beyond, it seemed to Katharine Fane as though she had left all gloom and night behind her for ever;

as though light and hope and rosy promise for to-morrow were here, away from Lord Petres, away from everything belonging to her old life, and with Steven !

The strong back-current drifted them so easily along their course now that only an occasional stroke of the sculls was needed to keep the boat in its right track ; and before Katharine could seriously reflect that they were getting more and more out of the direction of home, they were lying alongside of the slip ; a primitive stone jetty which had been constructed, the Lawrences said for fishing, their enemies in old days, for smuggling purposes, but conveniently close, at all events, to a moss-grown arched porchway which opened, on the other side of the narrow road, into the garden of Ashcot farm.

Steven jumped ashore, and in a minute had made the boat fast by a chain to one of the staples on the slip ; then he returned, and without saying a word offered Miss Fane his hand.

"It is hardly worth while for me to get out," she said ; but as she spoke she put her hand in his, and left the boat. "I ought to be back already. Mr. Lawrence, really and in earnest, I must not be here five minutes."

"All right," said Steven, "in five minutes

you shall return. I only want—a foolish fancy, isn't it?—that you should take one walk round my garden in the moonlight to-night. It's kept up in a different fashion to the gardens you are accustomed to see:" saying this he pushed open the ponderous old gate for Katharine to enter: "a different fashion, even, to what it was in my young days, but I believe I like it as it is. Thanks to Barbara, there are no weeds at least; and homely flowers smell as sweet as hot-house ones on an evening like this."

Katharine had never in her life before been inside the Lawrence's gates; had never seen the farm garden nearer than from the five-acres, across which Steven had led her in that lingering "short cut" of yesterday. Its quaint old-world air, its old-fashioned borders, with their bushes of lavender and rosemary, their plots of tall white lilies, cottage marigolds, and sweet-smelling flox, made her love the place on the instant: for, in spite of a Scotch head-gardener and her own knowledge of Latin names, there was still a good deal of poetry left in Katharine's heart—about flowers.

"The plants I brought from America are on the other side of the house," said Steven; "but it's too dark to ask you to look at

them to-night. You must turn to the left, please, under the mulberry tree—that is, if you can find room to get along.”

And going on first, he held aside the dark over-arching boughs for Miss Fane to pass; then led her away by a narrow path to the end of the garden farthest from the house. Steven would sooner have confronted most things than old Barbara at this moment, and with one of the gentry by his side.

. . . . A low stone wall, some three or four feet in height : a group of laurel, cypress, and bay, overhung by a solitary silver beech : a distant expanse of sand and rock : a great star trembling through the purple overhead —When was Katharine Fane to cease from being haunted by recollections of that scene ?

“What a dear old garden !” she said, her face upturned to Steven’s. “What a pleasant place to dream alone in of a summer’s evening ! I have always thought a great deal of our terrace at home till now, but I like this sea-walk of yours better. How still it is here ! how far away we seem to have got from all the rest of the world !”

“This is my favourite walk,” said Steven. “When it is lighter you can see straight across the bay to the Dene, and every night

after work is over I smoke my pipe here—exactly at the spot where you are standing. Sit down for a minute or two—won't you? This angle of the wall, with the beech-tree for a support, doesn't make a bad arm-chair."

His tone had changed more and more, and Katharine's heart beat quick. "I'm afraid I shan't be able to stay now," she hesitated; "but another time, if you will let me come, with papa and Dora——"

"Another time is no time," said Steven. "Miss Fane, how can you be unkind enough to refuse me? Surely, your guests will be able to spare you for a short five minutes longer?"

"My guests? oh, I did not think of them," answered Katharine. "I was thinking, as I generally do, of myself alone."

"You have had enough of Ashcot already, then?"

"Indeed, I haven't. I could stand here looking at the sea for hours. I mean—I——"

She faltered—stopped short; and again the faint lapping of the tide, or fitful sweeps of wind among the beech-boughs, alone broke the delicious calm of the misty, sea-scented air. After a time—almost with a

shiver: "How late it must be growing!" cried Katharine. "The five minutes are over now, Mr. Lawrence, and I must really go. It is getting cold. Mamma would not like me to be out so late."

"Cold!" said Steven, who was carrying the plaid upon his arm; "why, of course, you are cold in that thin dress, and I—selfish as I always am—did not remember it before." And coming to her side he unfolded the shawl, and began to wrap it, gipsy-fashion, around her head and shoulders.

"Please don't stifle me," said Katharine, trying to laugh. "I don't want to catch cold, but I should like to be able to breathe a very little, all the same. Now, if I only had a pin—hold the plaid so, one moment, please, and I will take the brooch from my dress."

Steven obeyed her; and his obedience cost him dear. Up to this instant he had constantly resolved to bear his fate like a man; to die and make no sign. When he found himself alone with her in the boat, a sort of wild hunger to see the beautiful face, for once, by his side at Ashcot, had come across him. This was all. He had been inspired by no more insensate hope than that Ka-

tharine Fane should walk with him to-night round the old farm garden: walk there—then leave it sweet for ever by the recollection that she had trodden its paths! But now, one of those seeming trivialities which do, in fact, sway men's lives more than any result of reason, more than any bursts of violent passion, was destined to overcome him. He held the plaid where he was bidden, and as Katharine moved to take out her brooch, the soft girlish cheek for an instant touched his hand. And Steven lost his senses.

“Katharine,” he whispered, bending down his head to hers, “I love you!”

CHAPTER VI.

AN OFFER OF LOVE.

FOR a full minute she was dumb. All subterfuges, all feints, all the petty artillery of self-defence that had so often stood her in good stead before, swept away, and the voice of nature calling to her, imperatively as it calls to the hawthorn buds in April or the ripening fields in June. Lord Petres and his money; the Catholic church at Eccleston; her future diamonds; London houses; country houses; Mrs. Dering; the world's opinion;—where were they now? A flood of new life seemed to have passed into her veins. Her heart beat thick and sick with an emotion for which she knew no name; she could not reason with herself, she could not attempt to speak; could do nothing but stand by Steven, voiceless, transfixed, as one blind or dumb might stand who had had his missing sense suddenly

restored to him. For a full minute, in short, Katharine Fane was a woman, happy with as natural, as honest a happiness as little Polly Barnes had felt when Peter Nash of the mill first took her red hand in his, and awkwardly whispered such poor version of life's fairest story as he knew how to utter in her ears !

With a face set and pale as marble, silent, motionless, Steven stood awaiting her reply. He was, I think, in this minute less agitated than Katharine. His confession seemed to have cut him off from all the hopes and fears, the fever-fits of suspense, which once used so to unnerve him in her presence. He was no longer her slave, dreading to speak a too presumptuous word lest she should banish him ; no longer her inferior, whose love, whose very admiration, must be delicately couched, if it was spoken at all, lest it affront her. He had given her of his best now. He had offered her as much as a prince can offer to a woman, and her superior, at least for this one minute out of their widely separated lives, he stood and waited for her answer.

It came : in a voice unlike her own, certainly, but with calm unfaltering accents, in irreproachably dignified words : Mrs. Dering

herself could scarcely have chosen better ones.

"And this, then, is the return you make! after all the friendship that there has been between us!"

"It was never friendship," said Steven, "you know, as well as I do, that it was never friendship. From the moment I saw you I loved you, and you knew it."

"I—I had hoped of late," stammered Katharine, the firmness of his tone not aiding her self-possession, "I had hoped, day by day, that you were getting the better of your first madness——"

"Hoped! you have seen, day by day, and hour by hour, that my love for you has gone on increasing!" he exclaimed. "I never tried to hide it. I couldn't have hidden it. It has become part of myself. I've no life but in you. You are in my work and in my sleep. Your face is before me always. I never thought to tell it you till a minute ago, but I'm glad I've spoken. It was due to you and to myself. Katharine, do you reject me?"

He had not moved from her yet, his pleading face was close to hers in the moonlight, his hand still touched—trembling as it touched—the plaid that she wore.

"Reject—*reject you!* Mr. Lawrence, do

you know of what, do you know to whom, you are speaking?"

She drew herself away from him coldly. The word "reject," had bared abruptly to her the enormity of Steven's offence; the blackness of the gulf on whose brink she had for a moment vacillated. His confession had not been a mad involuntary outburst of adoration, a cry wrung from his lips in defiance of his reason and of himself. It had been a deliberate avowal that an equal might have made her, demanding an especial answer, a "rejection." Steven Lawrence, let the truth be told, had asked her not to walk upon his peasant heart, but to love, to marry him! This was the pass to which her socialism, her quixotic, too-generous contempt for difference of rank and birth had brought her.

"I remember everything," said Steven, "I am in soberer senses at this moment than I have been for weeks past. I speak of love. I offer you, Katharine Fane, my love, and I am waiting here for your answer."

Again she paused for a moment. The strange sound of that word "love," spoken as he spoke it, softening her into pity in spite of everything. At last "Mr. Lawrence," she whispered, "let all this be for-

gotten between us. Don't force me into saying more. Let me return home now, and in a few days come and see us again and I will promise you that you shall find no difference in me. Why should you insist upon destroying a friendship that has brought such happy hours to us both?"

"It has never existed," said Steven, quickly; "friendship between a man of my age and a woman like you! Keep such terms for the men of education—the cold-blooded, smooth-tongued men of the world, to whom they may have a meaning. I want no friendship from you. I want all or nothing. If you turn from me, I never want to see your face again after to-night."

Genuine passion made his voice eloquent, and Katharine's heart rang to it. "I wish to Heaven you had never seen me!" she cried, half in tears. "I wish to Heaven you had never come among us! I can't help it all, as you know. I was bound hand and foot—bound as much as if I had been a married woman before I saw you; and when I first met you, it was under the belief that you were Dora's suitor. You know this as well as I do."

"Miss Fane, do you remember that first moment when we saw each other?"

"I—I—what is the good of talking of these things now?"

"I held you in my arms, and I kissed you. Well," said Steven, in an odd, compressed sort of voice, "I am so much to the good for ever! When you are gone, when you are married to Lord Petres, I shall still have that moment, that kiss, for my own possession."

"You are cruel to go on talking like this," she cried; "I would have given much to make your life happy, and I have only made it miserable." Her voice choked.

"Do you care enough even to be sorry for me, then?" he said, coming closer to her side again.

"I do," cried Katharine, raising up her face to his. "I like you as much as in my position it is right for me to like any one. Be just, Mr. Lawrence. Have I not been straightforward with you throughout? Didn't you know from the first that I was engaged? Have I not—has not Lord Petres spoken to you openly of our engagement?"

"It is an engagement without love on either side," said Steven, bravely; "an engagement that it would be honest to break than to hold to. Do you think, if I believed otherwise, I should be saying what I say?"

Do you think I would have tried to come between little Polly Barnes and the lover she married on Sunday? Why, I call a man less than a man who, for his own passion's sake, would seek to win the love that belonged by right to another? But love has no place in your engagement. Lord Petres is to give you his money, his name; and you, your youth, your beauty, yourself—God! what a bargain—in return! It is a barter, and a dishonouring one. If you were to go to-night to Lord Petres, and tell him you wished to be set free, he would release you frankly and hold you blameless. So much I know of him.”

Had Steven been deliberately trying to steel Katharine Fane's heart against himself to the uttermost, he could not have found words more fatally fitted to the purpose than these that, in his supreme ignorance, he had lighted on. A woman of her nature can forgive most things sooner than the assumption that a lover she has accepted *could* give her back her freedom “frankly.”

“You speak as I might have expected,” she cried, with a tremble born rather of anger than of weakness in her voice. “You speak as I might have expected you would do, now that, for the moment, you feel me to

be in your power. Lord Petres is a true, loyal-hearted gentleman, whose faith to me is as staunch as mine to him. How should you understand him, or the feeling that he bears towards me? If—if Lord Petres were to offer me my freedom, as you say, I would not take it. If I had never seen Lord Petres—if I was unbound by any promise whatsoever, I would not stoop to listen to your suit. Now you understand me?"

"I do," said Steven, slowly and distinctly; "the Lord help me! I do understand you at last. To lose you is the bitterness of death, Miss Fane; yet, perhaps, to have gained you had been worse for me. You would never have learnt the meaning of my love. You would never have known what to do with a heart filled as full as mine."

She was silent: anger, pity, remorse, resurgent love, each struggling for mastery in her breast.

"After to-night, it's not likely you'll see very much of me again," said Steven, after a minute that to Katharine was an eternity had passed in silence, "so I'll make no excuse for troubling you with one question now. *What* has been your object—your pleasure, in leading me on to this? Some day, when I'm able to look back quietly to it all, I

should just like to have so much made clear to my mind."

"I never tried to lead you on," she faltered. "Tell me of one word, of one look of mine that has ever misled you?"

"Tell me of one word, or of one look, that has not misled me!" said Steven. "You knew from the first what I was—how ignorant, how utterly your inferior in every way. You knew—yes, from that night at the theatre, when you wore the flowers I had sent you, when you advised me, calling yourself my 'friend,' to come often to your house—you knew of my love for you just as well as you know it now. And still you kept me at your side, still, day after day, you asked me to your house. Why, yesterday—God, the fool that I am to remember it all!" he broke off abruptly—"fool that I am to speak of it! Why have you brought me to this? to gratify your vanity, the only real strong feeling that you are capable of, and to amuse yourself by looking on hereafter at my ruin!"

"Your ruin!" she repeated, under her breath. "Oh, Mr. Lawrence, I implore you not to speak like that."

"I speak the truth," said Steven, sternly. "These few weeks in which I have lived

through a fool's heaven at your side have ruined me. How do you suppose I shall go back to my old life—to my work, to my equals—and you lost to me?"

"You—you speak with passion now," she answered sadly. "In time you will find some one fitter—worthier of your love than me, and——"

"And I shall love you, and you only, till I die," said Steven, with a sort of sullen triumph. "Whatever becomes of me, and of you, Miss Fane, remember what I have said to you to-night. You have ruined me. It had been better for me I had never been born than have lived to see your face! and I will love you till I die. Now do you wish to go? Unless I get the boat off at once," he was speaking just in his accustomed way again, "I shall not be able to land you at the Beacon rock as I promised."

Without waiting for her answer he walked back along the path by which they had come, holding away the boughs for her as he had done before when they reached the gateway. Then, neither of them speaking a word, they returned, side by side, along the moonlit silent jetty to the boat.

A heavy dew had fallen since the sun went down, and Steven took off his jacket and laid

it on the wet seat for Miss Fane. "No, indeed, Mr. Lawrence," she cried, when he had helped her into the boat, "indeed, I will not be so selfish. I could not think——"

"Sit down," said Steven, in the half-imperative, half-pleading tone that from the first had made its way so straight to Katharine's heart. "A sprinkle of English dew isn't going to hurt me. I'm not quite so sensitive as that!"

Then he laughed—a laugh that it was cruel for her to hear; and taking up the sculls, pulled as straight as the fast-ebbing tide would let him towards the Beacon rock.

It was brilliant moonlight now. The shallow sea glimmered and paled like one great sheet of changing opal among the half-bare rocks. The boat as it glided on left a glittering track of emerald white upon the water; the voices of a band of village people, getting ready for midnight sand-eeling, came to them ever and anon in pleasant murmurs from the shore; an accordion rudely played by some fisher-lad's hand seemed, at this distance, and silvered by its transit across the bay, to make actual and pathetic music.


"What a good world it is!" said Katharine, almost involuntarily, after a long unbroken silence. "How easy it ought to be

for people to live happily in it! Mr. Lawrence, I feel—oh, I do feel so miserable for having spoken to you as I did! Let us be friends again!”

Steven stopped in a moment at the sound of her voice. He drew his sculls within the boat, leant forward and looked at her steadily. There was an expression not at all good to see about the corners of his lips.

“Miss Fane, can you guess what I have been thinking about during the last quarter of an hour?” he asked her, abruptly; “what I am thinking about now? Of course, you can’t. How should you enter into any thought or feeling of mine? I’ve been thinking . . . do you know, that we shall pass a bed of sunken rocks just before we get to the Beacon? here and there a sharp black point above the water shows you at this moment where they lie. . . . Well, why shouldn’t I run the boat straight in upon them now—she’d sink in a minute—I know the exact point where many a boat has been lost before this—and so put an end to everything?”

“I don’t see anything against the scheme as far as you are concerned,” said Katharine, calmly. “I can’t swim; you, I suppose, can; but of course as we are alone here no one would ever know that you had made



away with me on purpose. Do it. I am not afraid."

"You are not afraid because you don't believe a word I say," answered Steven, but still without taking up the sculls. "You've lived your safe, well-smoothed, passionless life, till you don't believe in any strong impulse—bad or good. You can't guess even at the sort of thoughts that fill my heart at this instant. Why, to take you in my arms and die with you as I might here——" his voice shook with passion as he spoke; "my lips to yours—is the strongest temptation I've ever withstood yet in my life. Do you hear me?"

"I hear you; I give you every credit for the sincerity of your wish to drown me; and I'm not afraid," said Katharine, looking unflinchingly at his face. "I have never been afraid of madmen yet, nor am I now. We will return, please (whether you eventually upset the boat or not), to what I was saying. Let us be friends again. Steven," after a moment; for the first, the last time she called him by his Christian name, and leaning forward, held out her hand to him, "I ask you to forgive me."

Steven seized her hand; he held it, with a grip that hurt her, in his own. "I can't

CHAPTER VII.

AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

TO estimate aright the poignancy of Steven Lawrence's despair, you must remember the undividedness of his passion. Most men of the world have some counter hope, some counter interest, some counter suffering, it may be, to fly to under the first intolerable smart of a disappointment in love. Steven had absolutely nothing. From the moment that he saw Katharine Fane on his return to England until now, he had lived, unquestioning of the future, upon his madness. The whole earth to him had been sweet with Katharine's breath, bright-dyed with Katharine's beauty; and in an hour sweetness and fairness both had been wrested from him violently.

For a few days he got up and went to rest, ate his meals, did his work as usual; would not give in, he said to himself; would not let his life be altered, in any way, be-

cause a girl's fickle vanity had chanced to come across it. Then he broke down; broke down into despair all the blacker because of the pent-up feelings, the dogged miserable attempt at self-control of the first few days. What was he working for, what was he striving after? When he had got the farm back into order, what but slow torture would this round of monotonous country duties be to him? the monotonous round, which a week ago had been so full of relish! At least let him try to forget himself and her in change; any change, any excitement, no matter of what kind; the first that offered itself. Was he to go on fretting like a sentimental schoolgirl who has lost her sweetheart? Were a high-bred waxen face, a beautiful cruel mouth, the only things worth possessing that the world contained? Because a man has lost heaven, is he to give up earth too?

It was in his old place under the silver beech (the first time he had had courage to smoke his pipe there yet) that the demon entered Steven's soul; evoked, perhaps, by some mocking vision of the waxen face, the beautiful cruel lips, that had disdained him here! The next morning he announced abruptly to old Barbara that he was going

away from home for a week or so ; and as he was waiting at the station an hour later, fell in, so well does chance sometimes help men on along the downhill road, with Lord Haverstock, and young Mr. Mills the horsedealer, going up to London.

His lordship was very pleasant indeed in his manner to Steven ; Lord Haverstock, in truth, was never so pleasant or so much at ease as with men of a lower class than his own : made him and Mills renew their old acquaintance, asked him what he was going to do with himself in London : finally proposed, when they were in the train, that Steven should go down with them and see the cup run for at Newmarket, and that they should all three “make a week of it” together.

They made a week of it ; and Steven came back to the farm late on Saturday night, flushed with wine after dining at Lord Haverstock's, the holder of a considerable sum of Lord Haverstock's money, also of the opinion, that to see a little of life, and to be in the society of other men, was all that he wanted for his cure. Heartbroken ! What man of sense cares for anything but himself, and for his own pleasure now-a-days ? Had Miss Fane a softer hand, a

pair of rosier lips, than scores of other women, less difficult to please? And he woke next day to feel that he had been talking blasphemies; woke, and as he looked in the red dawn towards Katharine's house, knew, unworthy though he was! that he did but love her the more for this background of the last few days against which her pure girl's face shone in such unutterable contrast.

He went to Shiloh as usual that morning, and when the congregation came out of chapel found himself received with more than ordinary warmth by his different acquaintance. That Steven Lawrence, like young Josh, was going as straight as he could go to the mischief, was an opinion that during the past week had been promulgated pretty freely among the elders of the congregation over their last friendly glass of spirits-and-water together of an evening. Still, human nature being much the same in this primitive village as elsewhere, the fact that Steven Lawrence had "taken on" with Lord Haverstock, been with him to Newmarket, dined with him at Haverstock last night, added quite as much to Steven's social and personal popularity as it took away from his spiritual reputation—among the female members, at least, of Shiloh. It was no wonder the

family at the Dene had asked him there so often. My lord himself didn't look half so much the gentleman as Steven—no, nor was half as fine or handsome a man either. And coming out of chapel pretty Miss Mason the builder's daughter and leader of Shiloh society bade her papa in a whisper invite Steven Lawrence to "tea and supper" with them after service this evening.

Steven accepted the invitation and went. Why, he asked himself, should he remain longer aloof from these people who by birth and education were his peers? Was it true, was it manly pride to hold himself above the class who would receive him as an equal and, mourning for Katharine Fane in his heart, become a hanger-on, as Josh had been, of Lord Haverstock's, a companion when my lord wanted him on a racecourse, or to drink and play cards with men like Mills at Haverstock in the absence, of course, of my lord's own friends? Here were simple, honest-hearted people who had been his father's associates and were more than good enough for his. Here was a fresh village girl, with the beauty at least of youth and good-humour on her face, and who would make just the sort of wife that Klaus had told him he must choose to mind his house, and bring up his

children, and set a dinner before his friends at Christmas.

He went, he forced himself to take interest in the small village gossip with which Mrs. Mason and her daughter enlivened old Mason's prosy village politics at the suppers. He forced himself to admire Lucy Mason's black eyes and rosy cheeks and bright blue ribbons, and boarding-school manners, and next evening, half by accident half by tacit appointment, met the girl and walked with her for an hour or so in one of the lanes near Ashcot, when his work was done.

As he was loitering at her side, Miss Mason, in bluer ribbons than ever, looking up with all the village coquetry she was mistress of into his handsome face, Katharine Fane and the Squire rode by them quickly on horseback, and as they passed Katharine turned and bowed gravely to Steven. She looked pale and out of spirits, he thought: her face seemed to have lost its youth since he saw her last. And late that night, hours after Steven Lawrence had quitted poor Lucy Mason with a cold good-night at her father's door, a man's figure was seen by some of the servants at the Dene stealthily making its way from the shore to the terrace, then up through the shrubberies in the direction of

the house. Mrs. Hilliard and Dora when the story was told next morning both implored the Squire to get a policeman to sleep in the house. Katharine, conscience-smitten, held down her face, and in the course of the forenoon, after a good deal of unnecessary circumlocution, made some excuse for asking her stepfather if he did not think it would be well for him to ride round to Ashcot soon to call on Steven Lawrence?

"Something, I think, must have hurt his feelings, papa," she said; "perhaps he was annoyed we did not ask him to dinner, when Lord Petres and Bella were here, that—that evening, you know, when I went out in his boat. If you were to call, and say we hope to see him again soon?"

"I'm going to call at Ashcot this very afternoon, Kate," said the Squire, unconsciously: "Macgregor wants to have a trial of that big roller of Lawrence's, and I'm going over to ask him for it. As to thinking the young fellow could expect to dine here with our friends," added Mr. Hilliard, "'tis nonsense, Kate, and the sooner he gets such false views out of his head the better. The lad's a good lad—won't be improved by taking up with Lord Haverstock, though—and he knows his way to the Dene without my

telling it him. I suppose, if the truth's told, Miss Dora put on some of her fine French airs with him the other night, and choked him off a bit."

When the Squire came back late in the afternoon to dinner, Katharine, as it chanced, was lingering, a book in her hand, in the avenue, and ran forward, eagerly, to speak to him. "And what did he say, papa?" she cried, when Mr. Hilliard had done telling her some piece of country news that he had heard in the village.

"What did who say?" said the Squire. "Oh, Lawrence! why, he'll lend it me, of course. Between ourselves, I don't see what he wants of it, Kate, with a bit of a grass-plot like his; but 'twas one of young Josh's foolish fancies. I dare say, if Macgregor likes the roller, Lawrence wouldn't refuse any reasonable offer I chose to make him for it—what do you think?"

"I? Oh, papa, I think it would be much better to borrow it. He might be offended, you know, if you were to talk about payment. Did—did Mr. Lawrence say when he was coming to the Dene again?"

"He said nothing about the Dene at all, Kate. He's very much taken up about his hay. It was stacked hastily, and, I tell him,

half of it stands as good a chance as ever I saw of firing."

"But he was just the same as usual to you, papa?"

"The same? Why, bless my heart, Kate, what fancies have you taken up now!" cried the Squire. "Of course the man was the same. One would think, from your face, I had gone to borrow a thousand pounds of him instead of a rusty old roller. He seems in very good spirits, in spite of his hay, and tells me he won a nice little sum down at Newmarket. Better stick to his farm, I say; but that's just the way of the Lawrences—if they don't ruin themselves in one way, they will in another. Where's Macgregor, I wonder? I must tell him to send James over for the roller this evening."

Taken up about the firing of his hay; in good spirits over his winnings at Newmarket! And she had been weak enough to think that his face looked changed and haggard; that he was haunting the Dene like a despairing melodramatic lover at midnight; that his dissipation at Lord Haverstock's, his flirtation with Lucy Mason, were attempts to get away from himself, and from the pain that *she* had brought upon him. Katharine hardened her heart against Steven on the moment; even

put in a small joke about him and Lucy Mason in a letter she wrote to Lord Petres that night; and a day or two later, when she met him again—Steven alone, the rector at her side now—gave him a heartless little nod and smile, just as she would have done to Lord Haverstock, or any other thoroughly indifferent person of her acquaintance, and passed on.

The play was over, then, at any rate, thought Steven, bitterly, as he heard her laugh, in answer to some remark of the rector's, after they had gone by. Over; and an excellent good thing for him, too! As long as she hid her indifference, she might have kept him; yes, with only such a pale grave smile as she gave him the other evening, bestowed at ever such niggard intervals. She had paraded her heartlessness now—paraded it before his successor, the white-handed, soft-tongued parson fop; and he detested her. She innocent! she pure! she, as he had once dreamed, above all other women, whose glory—whose shame—it was to win one man's heart after another, listen with downcast eyes, give liberal smiles to all; and her love, if, indeed, a woman like that were capable of love, to none.

He spent that evening, not as he usually

did now, at Haverstock, but with young Mills, and some of Mills's friends, at the village public-house; drank with these men, talked with them, agreed in their views of life, sank himself altogether to their level. Then next morning, came the inexorable reaction again; the aching head; the aching heart; the loathing self-contempt; the love, purer, stronger, after every attempt to bring it to a shameful death!

The story is trite, and I do not care to linger over its details. Can you imagine how a piece of tapestry fashioned by some weaver smitten with sudden colour-blindness would look—all the bright hues there, cunningly woven, but jarring and dissonant? Something like this was Steven's state now. Youth, energy, capacity for enjoyment, every fairest material of human happiness, still his; but no purpose, no coherence running through it all! Love was stricken; and with love the gist, the meaning, the pattern of his life, seemed abruptly to have vanished.

The year ripened to its prime. Golden harvest weather shone on and around the old farm house (as Katharine had seen in her dream!), and one sultry noon as Steven was coming back to his dinner, his hands in his pockets, his face moodily downcast as

usual, Dora Fane stood suddenly before him in the path. It was impossible for him to retreat, as he had more than once done before Miss Dora Fane, of late. The lane was a narrow one, with high hop-grown hedges upon either side, and when Dot first appeared to him, jumping down from a bank, where, in accordance with her well known sylvan tastes, she had been sitting, reading the "*Journal des Demoiselles*," there were not a dozen feet, at most, between them. Steven walked up to her and accepted—what could he do but accept?—the little ungloved hand that was held out towards him with such friendly warmth.

"Good—good morning, Steven!" she cried, "how strange it seems to meet you! I didn't know—I didn't think you were ever going to speak to me again."

Dot was looking wonderfully young and pretty to-day, in a simple cambric dress, and with a broad Leghorn hat, natural poppies and corn flowers childishly adorning its crown, to shield her complexion. Her lips trembled, and something very like tears made her eyes soften, as she looked up at Steven; even her voice did not sound discordant to him, as it once did, now that his memory was fresh with images of Miss Mason, and young

women of Miss Mason's class, not of Katharine.

"Do you know how long it is since you have been to see us?" she ran on, as Steven stood, awkward and silent, but holding her hand, not without kindly pressure, in his. "Two months exactly, and never a word from you to say if I had offended you, and the last time you were there—do you remember? that night when all those people were on the terrace, we parted just as good friends as we had ever been in our lives!"

Steven dropped her hand, and turned his head quickly aside. That last evening; those people on the terrace; Katharine's smile of welcome; their parting at the Beacon rock; all had come back upon his memory in an instant with such cruel sharpness!

"It was impossible for me to come to the Dene any more," he exclaimed. "Surely, you know that, Miss Dora? Surely you know that I wouldn't have slighted you, or—or the Squire without cause?"

"I *know* nothing, but I have guessed enough—enough," cried Dot, with a little gulp, "to make me utterly miserable! Steven, I should like to hear that you free me from blame in all this? I never thought—I never could have suspected——"

Her voice broke down, and the sight of her quivering lips, the familiar sound of his own name from her lips, touched Steven's heart. "I accuse no one but myself," said he, kindly, "and you least of all, Miss Dora. You were only too good to me from the first!" And indeed his conscience smote him as he looked down at this poor little artless creature, and thought how absolutely she, and her friendship for him, had passed out of his recollection during the madness, the misery of the last two months.

"Well, I shall never hold myself quite innocent," said Dot, and, to show how nervous she was, she began to dig hieroglyphics with the point of her parasol in the dust. "If I had not, in my stupidity, sent you the wrong photograph you might never have returned, or you would have returned with no thought of *us* in your mind, and all this wretched misunderstanding might never have happened. Now mind," she went on quickly, "I've nothing at all to go upon but my own suspicions, Katharine has never mentioned your name to me since that last evening you were at the Dene. I only guess, and, as I told you, I can't hold myself innocent, and I have longed—yes, Steven, I have longed," and here Dora Fane's emotions fairly mas-

tered her, and two great tears rolled slowly down her cheeks, "to hear you say that you forgive me before I leave Clithero—before you bid me good-bye for good!"

In fairness to Dot it must be said that her agitation and her unhappiness were not wholly feigned. A letter written, in excellent spirits, by Mrs. Dering had given them tidings yesterday of the approaching marriage of Clarendon Whyte to an East End heiress; and, as much as it was in her nature to mourn, Dot, during the last twenty-four hours, had mourned over this infidelity of her hero's. The tears and the agitated voice were not wholly feigned; neither had she, of malice aforethought, way-laid Steven with the intention of making a last appeal to his pity or his pride. She had come out because she knew that even to walk alone in dull country lanes was better for her to-day than to sit at home fretting over the thought of Mr. Clarendon Whyte, and of his rich bride; when she got within sight of Ashcot, had felt, as she never had felt before, that she might have found a welcome asylum, but for Katharine, under its roof. And then, certainly, she had perched herself, not without deliberation, upon the bank by which she thought Steven

Lawrence would pass on his way from work ; had given him no chance of escape when she saw him approach ; and now was shedding tears, and murmuring out her little nonsense about his "forgiveness" as prettily as she could, with the object of softening him. There was just the mixture of chance, and truth, and artifice in it all, which has brought about the turning-point of many a worthier life than Dot's. She was very sincerely miserable ; and she sincerely wished Steven to say he forgave her—and a great deal more ! and (during the last minute and a half) she *had* formed a resolution of leaving Clithero. No wonder, as she believed herself, that Steven believed her, and softened. He was, he could be, about as much in love with Dot as with the flower-girl to whom he had given half-a-crown the day he landed at Southampton. But there is room for a great many tender feelings in a man's heart besides actual love. Dora Fane was a pretty woman, although she was not Katharine ; a pretty woman murmuring soft words of liking and pity towards himself, and big tears were rolling palpably down her cheeks, and her lips quivered ; and Steven's bruised heart longed passionately for any sympathy, any pretence

even of pure love, in the desolate life that he was leading.

“Good-bye?” he said, in a low voice; “and why good-bye? Why are you to leave Clithero? What new arrangement is all this?”

“It is my own wish that I should go,” said Dora, sadly. “No one but myself had anything to do with it. When—when Kate is married;” her eyes were down-cast still; but she could tell that Steven changed colour, “it would be loneliness greater than I could bear to live with aunt Arabella, so I mean to go out as a nursery governess. I am not clever, but my French, I think, will get me a situation, and I’m good at my needle, and Mrs. Dering will help me among her friends.”

“When?” asked Steven, abruptly. “When is it to be?” He could get out no more; and Dot knew well enough what question he wanted to ask.

“Oh, not till after the wedding,” she answered. “I should prefer, myself, to go now, but Kate would not hear of it, and of course I wouldn’t like to go counter to her in anything, dear child. Lord Petres is drinking the waters at Vichy, better, he writes word, than he has been for years

past; so I don't suppose there will be anything to prevent the marriage taking place in November. After that I shall go. But why do I trouble you with my affairs?" she interrupted herself; "how sweet the dear old farm looks!" and she turned to a gap in the hedge through which, as it chanced, the dear old farm was not visible. "How well I shall remember all the familiar scenes, the fields, and the beach, and—and everything;" rural detail was not a point on which Dot was strong; "when I am gone."

Steven Lawrence stood for a minute or more irresolute. Dimly it was breaking upon him that perhaps he had treated Dora Fane badly; that, in his blind passion for Katharine, he had ignored the possibility of the poor little humble cousin's caring for him; the poor little cousin who had been his friend, had treated him like an equal from the first. He hesitated; his whole future life trembling in this minute's balance; then Dora half turned as if to go, and held out her hand to him. "Good-bye," she faltered through her tears.

But Steven kept her hand closer in his. "Miss Dora, I've a mind to say something to you, yet I fear—I fear to offend. You know what I can offer," he went on, a sud-

den flush of brightness on her face emboldening him. "I don't deceive you. I have loved your cousin Katharine," her name came out without an effort, "as much as a man could love a woman so high above his reach, and of course there are things one doesn't get over in a day. If you could be generous enough to forget this—if Ashcot wouldn't be a home too humble for you—I would try, before heaven, I would try to make you happy there!"

She gave a little cry of surprise; she fluttered and trembled; then made a pretence of drawing her hand away from his. "This is too sudden, Steven! You have spoken like this from pity—from impulse."

"No, I think not," said Steven, in about as unlover-like a tone as could be imagined; "I speak altogether without impulse, Miss Dora. You are not over happy, I think. You talk of going out into the world among strangers, and I ask you, knowing this, if you will accept Ashcot as your home. Be sincere with me," he added, with something more of passion in his voice. "Let there be no further mistakes between us. Don't take me, for God's sake, if your heart says no!"

"And if my heart does not say no!" cried

Dot, breaking into a smile that made her almost look a girl again. "And if, in spite of the unflattering way you ask me, I do take you, sir?"

Her face was upheld to his; but Steven entirely forgot what most men remember to do under such circumstances. "I shall try my best, Miss Dora," he said, with perfectly earnest humility. "There are things one doesn't get over at once, you know, but I shall try always to give you the first place in my heart, and to make you happy."

So the dreary parody was played out, and they were engaged.

"And the thousand pounds will be my own, to do what I like with," thought Dot, as she was walking home—"a thousand pounds of my own, and Uncle Frank will give me my trousseau, and I'll go to Paris for my wedding-trip. Dear, honest, worthy Steven! of course I shall love you, and no one else in the world. Tra-la-la, tra-la-la! the prison bonds are burst at last!"

And the fickle creature sang aloud, and almost danced for happiness along the lanes which, a couple of hours before, she had traversed, heartbroken! Winter, and Ashcot, and life alone there, beside the dull farmhouse hearth, with Steven Lawrence, seemed

all a hundred years off to Dot's mind. Her wedding finery; a fortnight, a month, perhaps, spent in Paris; Parisian dresses, Parisian bonnets, were the visions that her spirit saw. I will do her the justice to say, that in these delightful dreams the false face of Mr. Clarendon Whyte was, for the moment, forgotten.

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD BARBARA SPEAKS HER MIND.

DINNER had been long ready, and Barbara had been fretting herself sorely about seeing good food spoilt—"as if there wasn't waste and ruin enough in the world already without that,"—when Steven, three-quarters of an hour later than his usual time, entered the kitchen.

"A quarter to two," said old Barbara, without deigning to look round at him, "and the bacon was boiled to a turn, and the beans got the butter put to 'em, as the clock struck the hour. It's none of my fault, Steven, if your dinner isn't fit to be set on table."

Steven threw himself down into a chair, and burst into a loud laugh. Barbara had not heard him laugh (at this hour of the day) for weeks past, and she turned sharply round from the fire and looked at him.

"Why, Steven, what ails you?" she cried, forgetting the soddened beans and overboiled

bacon in a moment at sight of his face. "You look as scared as if you had seen a ghost, lad."

"And so I have!" cried out Steven. "I've seen the ghost of my old life—the bachelor life you've read me such lectures about of late! Give me joy, Barbara. Never heed about the beans and bacon: joy has taken my appetite away! Come here," holding out his hand, "and give me joy. I'm going to be married!"

A deep flush spread slowly over Barbara's handsome, dignified old face. "Steven," she said, "it's ill joking on matters like these. Marriage is a sacred thing, and cometh of the Lord."

"And who says I'm joking?" cried Steven, with another laugh. "I tell you, in sober earnest, I'm going to be married, Barbara. Will you wish me joy or not?"

"I—I don't understand these new-fashioned ways of yours, sir," said Barbara, holding back from his outstretched hand. "In my time decent men didn't go bachelors to harvest-field in the morning, and come back troth-plighted at noon! There was families both sides to be spoke to, and the Lord's guidance asked, and furnitur' thought of, before it came to wishing o' joy and such

foolishness. Why, I wouldn't wish you joy of a heifer you'd bought until I seen what stock she came of, and what good she were likely to bring you—let alone a wife!"

"Oh, the stock's a good one," said Steven; "only too good, perhaps. Don't fear, Barbara! The Lawrences haven't been used to marry beneath themselves."

"I'll warrant it's that little Lucy Mason," cried old Barbara, natural feminine curiosity waxing strong now that her first indignant burst of surprise was over. "Take and eat your food, my lad, and don't say another word to me about it. Marrying and giving in marriage was never part of my business. You'll wed where you choose, I say; and it's well for your poor mother, Steven, that she's lying peaceful in her grave! a set-up boarding-school miss, as handless as a baby, and nothing but a pair of apple cheeks for her fortune! But I'm not surprised. I knew what it would come to when you went to supper with them Masons after the services. I knew it from the first."

Steven moved over to the table, cut himself some dinner, and ate resolutely through one help; then pushed away his plate. "I'm not hungry to-day, Barbara," he said; "but I'll make the better supper. I walked home

too quick under the sun. Now, then," he leaned back in his chair, clasping his hands behind his head, and looked up at the old servant, who was watching him narrowly, "I'll set your mind at rest. I'm not going to marry Lucy Mason—better for me, perhaps, you'll say, if I was. I'm going to marry Miss Fane."

"The Lord save and guide us!" cried Barbara, coming up all in a flutter to his side. "Miss Fane Katharine Fane going to marry *you*? Steven, have you taken clean leave of your senses?"

"I think not—I hope not," said Steven, quickly; "and—and I never said anything about Katharine Fane. I have asked Miss Dora if she will be my wife, and she says, yes."

Barbara stood like a stone, her keen old eyes rivetted upon his face. "Steven," she said at last, "what's the meaning of all this play-acting, and why did Katharine Fane come and walk with you that night—back in summer, you know—if you was the other one's sweetheart all the time?"

"I was no one's sweetheart," said Steven, the colour mounting over his sunburnt face. "I didn't know you watched me so closely, Barbara," he added, with an attempt at a

laugh. "I see I must be more careful what I do, and whom I bring here, for the future."

"You can do what you choose and bring *who* you choose, for me, Steven!" said Barbara, in stern displeasure. "There'll be no place for me in a house full of your fine brides and gentry. I seen enough of them at Ashcot already. Mrs. Joshua was a lady—to her own thinking—and young Josh couldn't ruin himself fast enough without having Lord Haverstock and the like to dinner, with their wines, and their oaths, and their godless gentleman ways. But he didn't do as bad as you, Steven! He didn't look for a wife among the people who ruined and despised him. One of the Fanes here at Ashcot! 'tis to be hoped she brings a good fortune to support herself on, I'm thinking."

"She'll bring a thousand pounds, I believe, Barbara," said Steven, with thorough good temper. The whole idea of his engagement, of his marriage, was so grotesque to him as yet that he could feel scarcely more excitement in discussing it than in discussing the follies of young Josh, who was dead and gone. "At least, I think a thousand pounds was the sum the Squire told me once he meant to give her on her marriage."

"A thousand pounds—thirty pounds a

year if it's safely put out," said Barbara, with grim accuracy. "Enough, if she's pretty saving, to find her in clothes. Steven, lad, I never thought you was overbright, but I did not—no, I did not—think you such a downright—"

"Idiot," said Steven, quietly. "Don't be afraid to speak the truth. Neither would I have thought it of myself an hour ago; but in love affairs most men are idiots once in their lives, they say. You've told me often enough during the last two months that the best thing I could do was to marry, and now I am going to marry you call me hard names. You're difficult to please, Barbara."

He got up from table, took his pipe from the chimney-piece, then, instead of going out of doors as was his custom to smoke, went and sat down in the broad old-fashioned sill of the open window, while Barbara, towering wrathful about the kitchen, swept away the dinner-things. The afternoon sun shone mellow across the ripening orchard and distant harvest-fields, lit up with pleasant homely warmth the new-filled rick-yard and narrow strip of herb-garden, lying under shelter of the farm gable: and, with a start, Steven's memory travelled back, softening

his heart as it travelled, to the days when Mrs. Joshua's rule had first set in at Ashcot, and when his only refuge in trouble had been Barbara, and the place in the kitchen-window where he was sitting now. Impulse—poor Steven's accustomed guide, not always a false one—bade him speak truth out to this best friend he possessed on earth, nearer than Central America, and laying his untasted pipe on the sill, he turned :

“Barbara !”

“Mister Steven.”

“Come here directly, and leave off calling me ‘Mister.’ I want to talk to you reasonably about this engagement of mine.”

She came up to his side, and Steven put his hand on her shoulder, and with gentle force made her sit down beside him on the window-seat. “What did you mean just now, when you said there would be no place for you in the house after my marriage? How could Ashcot belong to one of our name, I should like to know, and there be no place for you under its roof?”

The old servant's lips twitched. “As long as it was for you, and you alone, Steenie, I'd have done anything—you know that, my dear ! The world isn't what it used to be in my time,” said Barbara, “nor classes neither.

Folks think more of them above them and less of their Maker, and do travel and moither, and get to the end of their money and their lives faster than in the days when I was young, and of course you belong to your generation like the rest. I laid out your father and your grandfather for their coffins, and I sick-tended your mother to the last, and Mrs. Joshua (though not for the goodwill I bore her), and put up with young Josh's wild ways, and loved the poor lad, for the blood that was in him. But you are more to me than all of them, Steven. You always was . . . before you could stand alone you'd cry to come to me out of your mother's arms . . . and all I've got—not over much now—will be yours when I'm dead. But to wait upon this fine lady you've gone and fallen in love with . . . don't'ee ask me, Steven. I couldn't do it. She wouldn't suit me, nor me her, lad. Take my word for it."

"I am not in love with any fine lady. I am not in love with Dora Fane," said Steven, in a voice that even Barbara's suspicious heart felt was sincere. "When I came back home first I was a good deal at the Squire's, you remember. I wasn't thinking of poor Miss Dora then—the worse for me! and—well," said Steven, shyly, "I think,

perhaps, she got to care a little about me. During the last two months I've never gone near the house—"

"Nay, you have done worse than going there," interrupted Barbara.

"And—and to-day I chanced to meet Miss Dora as I was coming back from work, as you know. She told me she was to go out as a governess when her cousin marries, and I thought she would be happier at Ashcot, and asked her to marry me. I mean to hold to my word, and do my duty to poor Miss Dora; but don't you turn from me, Barbara! I have heaviness enough on my heart without that."

And he took up his pipe, and began mechanically to fill it with tobacco; then held it unlighted in his hand, gazing out, with a strangely blank expression for a newly-accepted lover to wear on his face, through the open window. As she watched him thus, some intuition, some fine sympathy of affection seemed, in a moment, to lay bare before old Barbara the real state of Steven's heart; and, with the belief that "her lad" was marrying more out of disappointment than from love, half, at least, of her bitterness against Dora Fane was, for that moment, disarmed. So much alike is the feminine

soul always, and in spite of external accidents of age or condition.

"Don't talk of 'turning' again, Steven. Whatever happens I'll never turn my heart from you. There's nothing surprising to me in all this!" Nothing ever was surprising to Barbara. "The first day you came back to Ashcot, I marked how keen you was to inquire after the Squire's people, and from that night I seen Katharine Fane here in her white dress—I was up in Mrs. Steven's room, putting by the blankets and covers for summer—flirting, and gracing, and standing there with her face downcast at your side, I knew you was being made a fool of. A fine-born lady, if she chooses, may take up with a handsome lad like you, Steven, as a pastime—my lord and his cook and his physic-bottles not by!" added Barbara, with irrelevant contempt; "but if a poor girl who'd got a lawful sweetheart of her own was to act like it, we know pretty well what sort o' name she'd have to go by!"


Steven winced as if he had been stung. "Never talk to me like that again, Barbara," he cried; "I won't listen to it. You've no right to speak a disrespectful word of Katharine Fane. She came here that evening by accident. I took her out in

my boat, and—and asked her to come and walk round the old garden with me, and she came. Whatever I was fool enough to hope or to suffer was no fault of hers. She's as much above me as the light in heaven, and I knew it from the first."

"And from that night till now what have you been, Steven?" said Barbara, hotly: "You came back—on my soul I believe you came back from America a steady lad, ready to give your heart to your land, and lead a God-fearing life among your own class. What turned you against it all? what made you take up with drink, and bad companions, and card-playing, and race-horsing, as you've done? I say, Katharine Fane; and may God reward her for it!" cried old Barbara, rising to her feet, and speaking slowly and solemnly. "It's small account to such as her to ruin an honest man's life for her diversion, but there's One will give her her due yet. As to this other——"

"As to this other, Barbara?"

"Well, lad, as to this other, Dora as you call her (and a woman thirty years of age, and never gotten to her size, 'll marry a yeoman's son sooner than marry none), though I do say that you've a poor spirit to wed with any of the name, still, if you have



past your word you must just hold to it, and I'll not set myself against her, worse than I can help, when you bring her home."

"And you wish me joy of my marriage, then, after all?" said Steven, with a singular sort of smile. "We've been a long time coming to it!"

"If marriage means giving up your bad companions, them and all belonging to them, I give you joy of *that*!" said Barbara, with terrible honesty; "but I'll wish you joy of nought else till I know better what I'm talking about. When you bring Dora Fane home, and I see her ways, and what fashion of wife she makes you, 'twill be time enough for wishing joy to my thinking!"

These were the only congratulations Barbara would offer; but when Steven came back from work at night, he saw that her eyes were red and swollen with crying; and, when supper was over and she was sitting quiet at her needle as usual, he put his arm suddenly round her shoulders, and, stooping, kissed her as he had done on the day of his return to Ashcot.

"You were quite right not to wish me joy, Barbara," he said, kindly. "Everything about my life hitherto has been a mistake—my marriage, for aught you can tell,

will be the crowning mistake of all. As much as you and I can do now, is to make the best of it, Barbara!"

Then he went out into the starlight; and, as he smoked his last pipe on the spot where he had stood with Katharine, began to realize, with some degree of distinctness, the kind of future that lay before him.

CHAPTER IX.

TEARS—IDLE TEARS!

THE first person Dora met, when she got inside the house, was the Squire; and, drawing him back into the dining room that he had just left, she at once told the artless story of her love into his ear. “And, oh, I hope you won’t be very cross with me!” pleaded Dot. “Poor Steven’s birth, I know, is not what you and my Aunt Arabella would wish, but—but I could never bring myself to care for anyone else, and my ideas of happiness are very humble ones. Remember the station of life in which you first found me, Uncle Frank!”

“You are a good little soul, Dot,” said Mr. Hilliard, looking at her with moistened eyes; warm-hearted and generous at all times, the Squire was never more so than immediately after his excellent lunch and sherry at one o’clock: “and whenever you and Lawrence want help you’ll know where

to look for it. If he can give you a comfortable home, and make you a good husband, I'd as lief see you married to Steven Lawrence as to any lord in England."

"Dear Uncle Frank! my best—my earliest friend!" cried Dot, holding up her face to be kissed. "Now I feel my mind more at rest. Now that I have your consent, I feel that I dare announce my engagement to my Aunt and to Katharine."

"Oh, as to Kate, you needn't be at all afraid," said the Squire. "Kate from the first did her best to bring Steven Lawrence to the house; indeed, if I speak the truth all I wonder is you didn't know your own minds long ago. From the first day he ever dined here, I could see pretty plainly myself what Master Lawrence was thinking of."

"Ah," said Dot, drooping her head, "we have each been a little to blame, I'm afraid; each misunderstood the other, and made ourselves miserable. Thank heaven, that foolish time is over now!"

"And all that remains is for me and Lawrence to have a talk together, and then speak to the parson," cried Mr. Hilliard, as pleased as a schoolboy at the thought of having a wedding in the house. "Well, Dot, you

have stolen a march upon Kate, you see, and quite right too. Seniores priores. Miss Kate will have to be bridesmaid before she's a bride, after all."

"Dear Kate! I'm sure when once she is reconciled to the marriage, my cousin will rejoice in my happiness," said Dot, demurely. "I—I told Steven I thought he might come over to-morrow morning about eleven. Would you mind having a talk with him then? He wishes, I know, to speak to you."

"Of course he wishes to speak to me," said the Squire kindly, "and you may rest pretty sure Dot that Lawrence and I'll get on well together in what we've got to say. Go in now," he added, "and tell your aunt about it all. You'll find Kate and her together in the drawing-room, and it's as well to set the matter at rest at once."

"If I could only be sure of every one taking it as you have done, Uncle Frank!" murmured Dora, as the Squire was leaving her. "If I could only think that Aunt Arabella would receive poor Steven as you will!"

She made a better lunch than could be expected—the Squire having left her alone, to rally from her agitation as he thought—took her accustomed glass of claret, and felt

in excellent spirits, and not in the smallest degree disposed to softer emotion, when a quarter of an hour later she entered the drawing-room to make her tidings known. Mrs. Hilliard, wrapped up in shawls, lay asleep over her novel on the sofa ; Katharine, without book or work in her hands, was sitting apart in the bay-window that looked towards Ashcot. Her face was paler than usual, Dot thought, stopping a moment, as she opened the door to watch her : something of youth seemed to have forsaken the rounded lines of cheek and throat : there was an air of listlessness and languor, very unlike Katharine, in the way her hands hung unoccupied on her lap. Did she really regret Steven ? Had the rector ceased to amuse her ? Did she want a new slave, or what ? Dora walked up to the middle of the room, took off her hat, seated herself in a position which commanded a full view of both her hearers, and rushed at once into her announcement.

“ I have a great piece of news to tell, Kate dear, and I give you three guesses to find out what it is. Aunt Arabella, I have important news to tell. Something I’m sure that you will be glad to hear.”

Mrs. Hilliard started up, annoyed in the first place at having been disturbed, and in

the next at having been asleep. Katharine turned round with a face like stone. "You are going to marry Steven Lawrence," said she.

"Brava, brava, Kate!" cried Dot, clapping her small hands together. "Now, that is what I call an intuition, a genuine bit of clairvoyance. Without a single hint, and after not seeing him for two months, I come in and announce that I've a secret, and Kate guesses it at once!"

"Then it is true?" said Katharine, rising, and coming towards her cousin, but looking whiter and whiter.

"Perfectly true," answered Dot, composedly, "I met Steven Lawrence in the lanes to-day, and he asked me to marry him, and I said yes. What in the world made you guess, Kate?"

"I have been expecting it," said Katharine, stooping and putting her arm round Dora's shoulder, "and now that it has come I wish you joy from my heart. Make him happy, Dot!"

Then she turned from her abruptly, and went and sat down, all in a tremble, on a low stool at her mother's side. "Mamma dear," looking up with a little wan smile at her mother's face, "this—this is good news—wish Dora joy!"

"It is a great shock to me," said Mrs. Hilliard, faintly; "but poor Dora never remembers that other people have not such nerves as her own. I never thought after all these years to meet with such a return—a common farmer, and you, Dora, one of the Fanes and great grand-daughter to Lord Vereker, and——"

"Oh, mamma!" interrupted Katharine, with sudden passion, "let us forget lords and ladies, Fanes and Verekers for once! Let some one be happy in the world! If Dora cares for Steven Lawrence let her marry him, in God's name! What are all the Fanes and Verekers who ever lived compared to her happiness?"

"I told Uncle Frank about it as I came in," said Dot, "and he gives his consent, and Steven is coming to speak to him to-morrow. We shall be very poor, I suppose. That I make up my mind to. And I know Steven isn't a gentleman, and I make up my mind to that. Good marriages don't fall to the lot of every one. I must take my life from beginning to end as it comes to me, and I can't think, Aunt Arabella, that you will be made very unhappy by my loss."

"If—if it wasn't so near!" said poor Mrs. Hilliard. "If it had been even in another

county, but—oh, Dossy, Dossy, well for you that you have been spared this!—not two miles as the crow flies, and a dissenter, and everything!”

“Well, now, I really do not see how distance would lessen the disgrace,” cried Dot, in her mocking way. “You need not trouble yourself to think of me when I’m married, my dear aunt, and as you never look through the north windows you won’t see more of our poor, humble, obnoxious dwelling than you choose. The thought of my cousins’ excellent marriages will console you, I’m sure, for the shame of mine, and as to religion—nothing would be simpler than for one of our family to change *that*, Aunt Arabella, as you are aware.”

“Dora,” said Mrs. Hilliard, drawing herself up erect, and with a light Dot knew coming into her mild blue eyes, “little as I know, or wish to know, of this person, Lawrence, and much as I feel that you are lowering your family and yourself by your marriage, I pity him.”

Dot jumped up, and made a curtsy.

“I pity, from my heart, any man who is to have a temper, a tongue like yours at his fireside.”

“Ah well! men live through a great deal

of domestic persecution," said Dot; "and if this poor misguided Steven wishes to marry me, his future sufferings are exclusively his affair, my dear aunt, are they not?"

"Yes, his sufferings and yours, too, will be your own affair exclusively," exclaimed Mrs. Hilliard, with a feeble burst of energy. "On your marriage-day my fifteen years of bondage will end. May Steven Lawrence's affection for you prove a truer one than mine has been."

"Amen," said Dot, piously. "I certainly shall have a poor prospect before me if it does not."

Mrs. Hilliard put up her handkerchief to her eyes. "This is my reward," she murmured, "and I accept it. Dossy—if from a better world it is permitted us to look back upon the hearts of those we loved below—you know——"

"My dear aunt Arabella," interrupted Dot, with the most thorough good temper, "don't be agitated, and don't commit yourself to any of those unorthodox apostrophes. My mother, if she is in a better world, and if she can look back from it, will see that you have behaved very decently to me—quite as well, I dare say, as she would have done if the case had been reversed, and a child of yours

had fallen, a pauper, into her hands. The Fanes are not, I take it, a family overburdened with natural affections." Mrs. Hiliard raised her soft eyes to the ceiling. "Kate seems to me the only one of the race who possesses a heart at all—and hers is fitful in its action! You, my dear aunt, and Mrs. Dering and myself, all seem to me to have been cut from one block, as far as our moral nature is concerned." And Dot laughed aloud.

"I wonder you can talk like this now, Dot," said Katharine, for the first time joining in the tournament. "I should have thought you were too happy to be bitter about anything to-day."

"Bitter! who is bitter, Kate? not I, in the least. I like to be able to speak out for once—it seems to expand one's lungs after so many years of silence—and an announcement of marriage, like a christening or funeral, is, I believe, a proper time for these delightful family expansions of sentiment. Aunt Arabella thinks I am ungrateful; I ask, what cause have I to feel gratitude towards her? Uncle Frank took me away from my bonnet-making in Paris, and I thank him, for his intentions at least, and you put your arms round my neck when I came, Kate,

and offered me a bit of your garden, and your only half-crown the first night I was here, and I am grateful—no, I'm much more than grateful to you. Who else has been kind to me? Arabella took away my little pink bonnet and my white parasol—the first I'd ever had, and Uncle Frank's present to me—I never forgot that! and Aunt Arabella . . .” Dot stopped short; and two great tears rose sullenly in her eyes.

“Go on, if you please, Dora,” said Mrs. Hilliard. “You have made me very ill—I feel my palpitations beginning already—but go on! Let me hear what single charge of unkindness you can bring against me?”

“You took away my silk dress!” cried Dora, with a burst of genuine feeling, “and had it made into one for Kate. ‘Poor Dora was not in a position to wear silks,’ I heard you say to Uncle Frank. Well, I bore no malice to the child herself—I wasn't wicked; when I saw how gentille she looked in it, I kissed her little bare neck and arms; but you, Aunt Arabella, I hated you—I hated you! and I don't think I've quite got over the feeling since. I had never had anything finer than alpaca before, and I loved my dress. I sat and looked at it when I went to bed—it came from Paris; it was

like a companion to me, and you took it away!" Dot's voice broke.

"I—I never heard such a ridiculous charge in my life!" said Mrs. Hilliard; "and unless you had had a most vindictive heart, you would have forgotten it years ago. Pray, how many dresses has your uncle, has Mrs. Dering given you since?"

"All I have ever possessed, I know," answered Dot, "but not one of them has made up for *that*. That came from Paris, and so did my little bonnet and my parasol, and I was a child then, and a stranger, and fretting—yes, fretting to be back among my friends—and you took my presents away from me! Hard as she was, the Mère Mauprat herself wouldn't have robbed a child!"

"Dora," said Mrs. Hilliard, half frightened, half conscience-stricken, "you shall not provoke me into using hard words to you. Ungrateful, unchristian though you are, I will not forget that you are Theodosia's child. You talk of robbery; will you tell me who is going to make you a settlement on your marriage? who will furnish you with your trousseau? who will——"

"Mamma!" interrupted Katharine, starting up and going over again to Dot's side, "I will not listen to another word of this!"

Dora ought not to have spoken to you as she did, but it's ungenerous—ungenerous to remind her that she is less well-off than we are. Poor little Dot!" and now she stooped and, for the first time, kissed her cousin's cheek; "to think that you should have been able to remember a dress and a bonnet, and a white parasol, all these years! Let that first grievance and every other one be buried now. You are going to begin a new life, you—you—" in spite of herself Katharine's voice shook, "have great happiness before you, I think. Don't let the first day of your engagement be spoilt in this way! Mamma, show that you are incapable of small pride, or small ill-feeling of any kind, and wish Dora joy."

Katharine's office, from the time she was eight years old, had been one of peace-maker; and long habit had taught her the art of bringing the contending parties at least to outward truce.

"I never bore ill-feeling to any one in my life," sobbed Mrs. Hilliard. "I've had no thought for eighteen years, I'm sure, but the happiness of others—as to pride, God knows mine has, long ago, been levelled lower than the dust!"

Then she waved Dora to her side, kissed

her in the same fashion and spirit that she had done when the Squire first brought the meagre-faced child home to the Dene, to be his wife's cross; and ten minutes later Katharine (sitting apart again in the window) heard them discussing together quite pleasantly about millinery, wedding breakfasts, white silk, and bridesmaids.

"The two Miss Ducies of Ducie, if we can get them," Dot remarks, "and Kate, of course, and I think old Grizelda Long: she's not ornamental, and she's not agreeable, but, as Arabella says, one never feels safe in leaving the Phantom out of anything. Besides, she has been bridesmaid so often that she knows exactly what to say and do, and it's a great thing at a wedding breakfast to get some one who will make the other people open their lips. I hope Steven won't want to be married at Shiloh, by the way; if he does, we must go there first, before the Ducies arrive. Now, Aunt Arabella, remembering how small I am, and everything, *do you think white silk or satin would become me best?*"

In the excitement attendant upon these momentous questions, Mrs. Hilliard's novel lay beside her unheeded for the remainder of the afternoon; and when the Squire came in

he found, to his happiness, no storm of moment awaiting him.

“Your mother takes this engagement of Dot’s beautifully—beautifully—by Jove!” he said to Katharine, when he found himself alone with her for a minute or two before dinner. “I can see pretty well what the thought of Lawrence’s humble birth costs her, but she makes light of her own feelings, poor dear soul, as she has always done, for the sake of others. Now, what do you say to it, Kate? Why, you are looking as grave as a judge, child. Surely you won’t be a turncoat to your own democratic principles now that you are put to the proof. What does it really matter whether the lad’s a yeoman or a duke, so long as he makes poor Dot a good husband!”

“I—but I am overjoyed to hear of it,” answered Katharine, her lips quivering over the falsehood. “From the time Steven Lawrence returned to England I thought how it would end, and——”

“And did your best to bring it on,” said the Squire. “What true woman won’t try her hand at matchmaking when she has a chance? Now I look back, I can see your finger in the pie all along. ‘Do ask poor Steven to dinner, papa.’ ‘Don’t hurt poor

Steven's feelings by offering to buy his roller.' 'How are poor Steven's spirits now that he comes to see us so seldom?' Eh, Miss Katharine? you have had pretty nearly as much to do with it, I suspect, as your cousin herself."

"I? Well, perhaps I have," answered Katharine, wearily. "Oh, papa, don't joke, please!" and the tears rose in her eyes. "All these engagements are terribly serious things to us who are the principal actors in them."

She tried at dinner to force herself into a little kindly gaiety with Dot; with a mighty effort she swallowed food enough to prevent her want of appetite from being noticed; and not till she had poured out her mother's coffee as usual, and listened to a long after-dinner talk about the wedding and the settlements, and what was to be written to Mrs. Dering, and what said to Steven to-morrow, made some excuse for getting away, and stole out unnoticed and alone into the open air.

It was chill, dull weather; a curtain of low-lying cloud shutting out horizon and sky; the sea leaden, the trees and garden plants mournful in their first yellow hues of waning summer. What a changed world from the one in which she had walked awhile since with Steven! every blossoming hedge-

row in its prime, and birds exultant, and sunshine over all! She went down to the terrace, stood at the same spot by the steps where she had stood with him on that first day he ever came to the Dene. What *was* life? she thought, resting down her throbbing head upon her clasped hands. What was the meaning of this play that was going on about her, above all of her own share in it? For twenty-one years she had drifted on, eating, drinking, wearing pretty clothes, praying, flirting, and amusing herself, and had never been troubled yet by wondering if any sterner purpose than Katharine Fane's pleasure lay behind it all. In this hour of humiliation—the word must out: in this hour of acutest jealous pain—a sharpened sense of the loneliness, the mystery, the awfulness of her own life overcame her, and changed Katharine Fane from a girl into a woman. She was going to marry Lord Petres; about the facts of it all there was neither mystery nor doubt; and have everything this world could give her, as Mrs. Dering said—make better her prospects for the next, probably, by upholding the old true faith; and Dora was to marry Steven Lawrence, the dissenting yeoman, and live in a poor farmhouse on a barren shore. And

the whole thing would be a miserable mockery, a shame, a sin! cried her heart; for she would never love her husband, nor Steven his wife; and across the great social gulf that divided them she would look back with guilty yearning, and see his face, as she had once seen it, white and passionate in the twilight, and know that her place ought to be at his side, and that her rejection of him had been a crime against nature, and her truth a falsehood, and her whole later life a hollow piece of tinsel sordid selfishness. Which spoke truth—the voice of pride, of prudence, of womanly reserve and dignity, or the voice of this new feeling which shook the very foundations of her nature, and made every old idea of happiness so pale and trite? Love! Did she love Steven Lawrence? Steven Lawrence whom she had rejected, whom she had so striven to forget, the man who in common coarse dissipation, had outlived *his* love in a fortnight, who already, won by Dora's pretty face, had pledged his word to an engagement that was an outrage to herself? Love! She ought much rather to hate him, only—poor Katharine!—she didn't. No, she could never hate him; and as she must never love him, she would try hard to be his friend, she

thought. They would be brought closer together when he was Dot's husband, and it would be noble, it would be generous in her to try and help on their happiness. Their happiness ; and why theirs ? cried her heart again. Why be generous and noble ? Why not be happy yourself ? And from low-lying cloud and leaden sea came neither hope nor answer. The shrill wind moaned like a reproachful human voice among the plantations ; the first dead leaves of autumn fell fitfully around her and at her feet ; and once again Katharine Fane wept (tears such as she had never shed, never while she lived could shed, for Lord Petres) for Steven Lawrence.

At the end of half an hour or so Dora came down to look for her. Katharine lifted up her head, and watched the small Dutch-doll figure as it drew near, pattering along as if the grass terrace had been a trottoir, and singing some song about "*l'amour et la folie*," with true French intonation and spirit ; and, for the first time in her life, a feeling very near akin to jealous hatred made itself felt in Katharine Fane's heart. She was horribly ashamed of herself—poor Katharine ! brimful of contrition and humility when, a minute later, Dot came up, seized her hands, drew herself up to her level, and

kissed her. "Kate," she said, "we have not been alone together yet. Now, *are* you glad that Steven Lawrence has asked me to marry him?"

"I? Why, Dora, you know I am—"

"—Speak the truth, please, Kate. I love you much better than I shall ever love him; and unless you like the thought of our marriage, I don't see that I need hold to my word. It isn't too late to change yet."

"My dear Dora, how can you talk such nonsense?" Katharine cried: something in the sound of her own voice shocked her! "You know very well I have always wished it. Papa says he believes I was trying my hand at matchmaking from the first. How can you talk of breaking your promise to Steven Lawrence?"

"I don't suppose it would break his heart if I did," said Dot. "We are not desperately in love, either of us, and don't pretend to be."

Every lingering feeling of repulsion towards Dora seemed to die away in Katharine's heart at the confession. "Unless—unless Steven Lawrence cared for you, Dot, he would not have asked you to marry him."

"Oh, dear, yes he would," answered Dot,

unhesitatingly. "He has been miserable and moping ever since that last evening he came here. You can guess why, most likely, Kate? then seeing me to-day reminded him of—of things that are past and gone, I suppose, and in the revulsion of feeling, I believe that is the correct sentimental expression, he proposed to me. How oddly everything has turned out! After sending him the wrong photograph, and not caring a bit for each other when we met, you see we are going to be married after all. I wonder whether people—the Ducies, I mean, and old Lady Haverstock, and all the county people, will call on me?"

"I wonder whether you feel happy, Dot? That is of more account than morning visits from Lady Haverstock and the Miss Ducies will ever be."

"Feel happy? Well, I don't know," said Dot, pausing to deliberate. "I did, at first—very. You see, I made up my mind to spend my honeymoon in Paris, and thought only of getting away from home, and—well, really, Kate, I believe I danced as I came along those horrid lanes. There was the prospect, too, of my little scene with Aunt Arabella to amuse me then. But now—Katharine, I'm not as heartless as you think

—now that the excitement is over, and I am settling down to the thought of my engagement, I *do* feel sorry,” and Dot turned away her face, “about poor Clarendon Whyte.”

“Clarendon Whyte ! who is already selling himself for so many hundreds a year to a woman double his age !” cried Katharine. “What a travestied world this is ! Why can’t some—why can’t any—two people who really love each other marry, I wonder ?”

“Oh, they would be very miserable if they did, depend upon it,” said Dot, philosophically. “If Steven had gained his wishes, and I mine, I daresay we should not have been happier than we shall be as it is. I like him, you understand—I wouldn’t have accepted him if I had not—and I shall do my best, of course, to make him happy.”

“Yet a minute ago you said there was plenty of time still for you to change your mind ?”

“Only if you had disliked the marriage, Katharine. I’ve thought lately,” went on Dot ; “yes, I’ll tell you everything honestly now ; I’ve thought that something was going a little wrong with you at times, and I wasn’t quite sure as to what it was——”

“Excessive weariness at the length of the rector’s visits, I should say,” interrupted

Katharine. "Has he been absent one day during the last six weeks, I wonder?"

"Well, very likely," said Dot, "or the heat of the weather, perhaps; you are always paler, I remark in summer. At all events, I determined I would ask you about it openly. It was possible, I thought, that you and Steven had had a serious quarrel that last evening we ever saw him at the Dene, and, if so, it might have been disagreeable to you for him to come into the family."

Was this genuine? the prompting of true and delicate affection, or only a little bit of the Gallican insincerity which was an ingrained part of Dora Fane's very nature! Katharine, ever ready to accredit other people with the highest, most generous motives, took it at its full worth, and felt more and more ashamed of her own first small jealousy.

"Dot, you and I must always be friends!" she exclaimed. "No matter whether our roads lie apart or near. Mind, that is a compact."

"Done," said Dot. "I dare say I shall not be overburthened with other friends when I live at Ashcot Farm! Arabella will be delighted—it annoys me to think how de-

lighted Arabella will be!—to hear that I and Steven, her two bêtes noires, are safely disposed of, and she'll send me a sufficiently expensive present, and have too severe an attack of her old headache to come to the wedding, and then—thank Heaven, she need never see my face again! Katharine, *how* I used to hate her, and Aunt Arabella! It seems quite good to talk of it now I'm going away. My love for you, I verily believe, was really only another form of hate for them."

"Don't talk of hate to-day, Dora. All that belongs to the past now."

"Ah—the past!" soliloquised Dot, stretching her tiny clasped hands across the terrace wall, which was just on the level of her chin. "The past is already a long word for me, Kate. I'm near upon thirty years old—I hope Steven Lawrence doesn't know it!"

"You had better tell him the truth, I should think," said Katharine. "The truth on that, and every other subject."

"There I don't agree with you at all," cried Dot. "The French say, wisely, that a woman is always the age she looks. I look twenty-five, at the outside: then why *be* more than twenty-five? For, of course, Steven doesn't remember whether I was

fourteen or twenty when he went to America. As to telling him the truth 'on every subject,' I can't imagine you to be in earnest. What! put a man like Steven Lawrence in possession of the charming little romance of the Rue Mouffetard and of Madame Mauprat? Never."

"There is no disgrace in the story," said Katharine. "At an age when other children played, you worked, Dora. It seems to me, Steven Lawrence would only love you better for hearing it."

"I won't try the experiment," said Dot, with determination. "My eyes have not been shut all these years, Kate. I know how good it is for a husband to believe he took his wife from a better position than the one he gave her. Naturally, Steven is like other men of his class—thinks it rather fine to marry a lady"—Katharine turned away her head impatiently; "but if he knew how my childish days were passed, he would have a right, some day, to remind me of it. Isn't that true?"

"I would be sincere, Dot. I would never be ashamed of a thing in which no shame was!"

Dot was silent. After a minute or two: "Katharine," said she, "that remark of yours

sets me thinking. I wonder what sort of woman I should be now, if they hadn't made me a hypocrite from the first—a better or a worse one? When Uncle Frank first found me in the Rue Mouffetard, you may believe I knew little of what was counted right and what wrong. He asked where we should go that first Sunday in Paris, and I said boldly, Mabilie. (I could die now when I think of it, and of his face. 'Me at Mabilie,' said Uncle Frank, 'and on the Sabbath!'). Well, we got home; and if I had been left to myself, I should have talked, to you at least, of my former life—the old house and the garden by the Bièvre. . . . it was full of flowers in summer, Kate; there were little clean white steps leading down to the river—and Hortense and Delphine It was all very poor and mean, I know; and, most likely, Hortense and Delphine were not angels. Still, you see, it *had* been all my life; and when I was taught never to mention it and to be ashamed of the people I had lived among, and yet had so little put into its place, I believe, somehow—I don't know how to express it myself—it stunted me, eh, Kate! Who shall say?"

"Who shall say!" repeated Katharine; for, indeed, this question as to Dora's latent

or possible good-heartedness was a hard one for her to answer.

“More likely than not, I have no inborn capacities for loving in me, as I told Aunt Arabella to-day. That very Sunday as I was walking with Uncle Frank in the Champs Elysées, I met two of my old friends with their sweethearts in blouses, and—well I thought myself a duchess, and passed them by without recognition!” Dot laughed, with unaffected amusement, at the remembrance. “That did not show a very noble nature, did it? Still I suppose I was human in those days, Kate?”

“I should hope for every one’s sake that you are human now,” said Katharine.

“For Steven’s sake, you mean. Well, whatever I am, I intend to keep him thoroughly in the dark about the Rue Mouffetard. ‘Our little Dora was brought up in the most retired way by a dear old French lady, a legitimist, of the Faubourg St. Germain,’ Aunt Arabella used to say, and that would be quite explanation enough—if he knew what it meant—for poor Steven. Now, if you were in my place, you would certainly go to Paris for your honeymoon, wouldn’t you, Kate?”

“If I was in your place no doubt I

should," answered Katharine, with a sigh.

"I didn't mean that. I meant where would you, yourself, go?"

"I, myself? wherever Lord Petres chose. To Paris, very probably."

"'Tis the best place on the earth," cried Dot; "above all for a honeymoon. Even without knowing a creature it would hardly be possible to get tired of each other. To look at the people on the Boulevards and the toilettes in the Bois would be amusement enough for me. It would be a mistake to get all my dresses made up until I see how they are worn in Paris, Kate?"

"I think it would be a mistake to go to Paris at all!" and Katharine gave one last wistful look across the sea before she turned away towards the house. "I should think the woods and fields around Ashcot would be far pleasanter than any crowded city in this quiet autumn weather."

"Fields about Ashcot!" cried Dot, putting her small hand under her cousin's arm. "A thousand thanks, my dear. I am to have fields, remember, and nothing but fields, till I die. At least let the dose be gilded by a fortnight of good wholesome bricks and mortar at starting."

CHAPTER X.

THE LAST APPEAL.

STEVEN came on the following morning punctually at the hour that Dot had ordered him, and was received in due form as an accepted suitor by the Squire and Mrs. Hilliard. He came again next day for exactly one hour and a half; and the next; but without seeing Katharine; and so matters went on for a week. It gave him a secret, a poignant pleasure all this time to feel that Miss Fane avoided him. If she were wholly indifferent to his engagement, he thought, she had been glad to meet him, and to let her indifference be seen. And at last he got so far as to ask Dot, in a tone of voice not very palpably forced, how it was he never saw anything of her cousin? Was Miss Katharine away from home or ill? He hoped not ill.

"Oh, Katharine is at home," answered Dot; "but I fancy she has not liked to inter-

rupt us yet. I shall tell her," looking up with pretty archness in his face, "that you are tired of being tête-à-tête already—you bad Steven! and ask her to be in the room when you come to-morrow. You will find her looking very pale," Dot ran on. "Just think, when old Mr. Ducie was calling yesterday he mistook her for the eldest, and offered her his congratulations. Her colour is quite gone—poor Kate! Really and truly, Steven, I don't think it kind of Lord Petres to remain abroad so long."

All that night Steven lay awake, burning with the old fever of doubts and fears—ay, and with the old fever of hope, where no hope was—and next morning, more than half an hour before his accustomed time, made his appearance at the Dene. Thanks to this half-hour he found Miss Fane alone in the drawing-room. Dora, whose leading ideas of an engagement, as of all other human affairs, were connected with dress, was still busy in her room over a charming little morning gown of white muslin and rose-coloured taffetas, a surprise—I speak in Dora's language—for Steven; and Katharine, who had no thought of his appearing before the usual hour, was at her piano, singing to herself that saddest love

song that I think ever flowed even from the pen of Glück: the old, old, ever-sweet "Eurydice."

Steven came in unannounced, for already he was treated as a member of the family in the house, and had listened to two or three bars, sung in Katharine's plaintive voice, before she saw him, and broke off. He had resolved to be thoroughly stranger-like and self-possessed on this, their first meeting, so begged coldly that he might not "interrupt her in her practice."

"My practice is over," cried Katharine, her face all blushes. "I choose an early hour so as to inflict as little on other people as possible. If you had once heard me sing, Mr. Lawrence, you would not wish to be in the room with my practising going on."

"I *have* heard you," answered Steven. "The first Sunday I was home—that Sunday I met you outside Clithero Church, do you remember? I stood under the chancel window and listened to the hymn after the sermon—I mean listened to your voice!"

Whenever they met, the book opened at the same page; whenever he looked at her, Steven's eyes got back the tenderness which in itself was a confession. Katharine crossed the room, her head erect, her heart hotly

beating, and stood at his side before the mantelpiece. What, had she sunk so low, she asked herself, that she must submit to sentimental speeches, to covert love-making, from this man now that he was Dora's suitor? He must be shown at once, shown pretty plainly, upon what kind of terms their intimacy for the future must stand! Then aloud, and in a marvellously grave calm voice, "Mr. Lawrence," she said, "I need hardly tell you how glad I am to see you in our house again—how unaffectedly glad of the cause which brings you here! I congratulate you on your engagement most heartily!" And she offered him her hand.

He took it: and in spite of the resolution of each the two poor foolish hands trembled in each other's clasp. "It seems more than eight weeks since I was here," said Steven, holding her hand tight, and looking down upon her face: white and changed that dear face looked to him now that the blushes had faded from it. "Of course I know that it's only eight weeks—it was on the sixth of July that I took you in my boat to Ashcot. Measuring the time by what I've suffered it seems nearer upon eight years, Miss Fane."

Katharine drew her hand away instantly. "I really don't see what you should have

had to suffer, Mr. Lawrence! Papa has spoken of you sometimes, wondering you never came to see him, but from what he said I should think you have been amusing yourself pretty well. You were at Newmarket with Lord Haverstock, I heard. You have already made plenty of friends in the neighbourhood."

"Amusing myself!" said poor Steven, with a sort of groan. "Yes, you must know how much! You must know whether I have been trying to find pleasure or stupefaction."

"Indeed I do not," answered Katharine, unwisely dwelling on the subject. "When I saw you last you were walking with . . . some person from the village, I think! You were looking in very good spirits, and I was delighted to see you so."

"And you were with the rector," said Steven. "Yes, that was the night I went desperate! After you passed me you laughed—I can hear how your voice sounded now—you laughed, and looked up in the parson's face and I swore to myself to be a man and get over my folly. Next day I went to London, went down to Newmarket with Lord Haverstock, and—well, I've been trying ever since to forget it all—and I haven't!

I have been with you three minutes," he exclaimed passionately, "and my madness is back upon me—worse than ever!"

Every tender, every pitying womanly fibre of Katharine's nature was stirred by his voice. "Listen to him!" cried her heart, in one last unavailing revolt. "Listen to him, while to listen is still no sin." "Turn from him!" cried reason; "blush for your own pitiful weakness, and turn from him!" And the conflict, this time, was not of long duration. "You make me feel that I have done well not to see you hitherto," she said, very low. "You make me feel how wrong it is of me to speak to you now. It was by my cousin's wish. I—I will never see you alone again."

"You will do as you like," was Steven's answer. "Keep away from me, or see me; what have I to do with your actions or your resolves? As long as I live I shall never be a hypocrite, with you at least. Whenever you do see me I shall speak the truth. I told you that evening at Ashcot I wasn't likely to cure of my madness, whatever happened. I tell you so now."

"And telling me this, and feeling this—if, indeed, anything you say or feel is sincere—will you tell me why you have asked my

cousin to be your wife?" cried Katharine, indignantly. "Is it not enough for two people to be mis—I mean," she interrupted herself, colouring violently, "is there any occasion why poor little Dora should be sacrificed too?"

"I don't believe that Miss Dora will be sacrificed," said Steven coldly. "Your cousin knows that she will command my whole duty—my duty, and as much as I have to give of affection—and so she takes me. You want to know why I asked her to marry me? Well, I can't tell you; I have put that question to myself pretty often during the last few days, and have not been able to answer it yet. From very despair, perhaps; I knew Miss Dora did not dislike me, and I knew, for very certain, that I could make myself no more miserable than I was. Perhaps I thought—how do I know—that by marrying her I should bring myself ever so little nearer to you, should have a chance of touching your hand, of hearing your voice once or twice a twelvemonth, should have a right to feel that I was at least *something* to you—the low-born husband that your cousin had stooped to marry . . . My God!" he interrupted himself, "mustn't the manhood have left a man

before he can degrade himself by words like these!" Then he stopped short.

Katharine Fane's head drooped low. "If you degrade yourself," she said, "you degrade me more. In such a position as ours, for me to be forced to listen to your words is a humiliation greater than I will bear. You will not meet me as a friend, I see plainly, and so, except in the presence of others, we will never meet at all. If—if all you say were true," she added; "if indeed you cared for me, sir, you would not subject me to pain like this!"

"Miss Fane," answered Steven, slowly and deliberately, "what you say is perfectly true; if I loved you as I once did, I could not, I dare not open my lips to give you pain—but I do not!" She gave a start and looked up piteously in his face; looked with an expression that seemed to cry: "Stab me with your bitter words, humiliate me with your contempt, do anything but cease to love me!" But Steven went on resolutely: "No, I do not. Poor Miss Dora will command my duty, as I told you, and such feeling as I have for you isn't likely to change. The woman I *loved* is dead. Yes," he repeated blankly, "dead, or rather, she never lived at all save in my own ignorant fancy. I got her picture

months ago, Miss Fane! I saw a pair of beautiful eyes, a soft-cut mouth, and I said those were eyes that could love honestly, lips that could speak brave words, and give a man brave kisses, and if I could win them they should be mine. Savage though I was, I had my own poor notions, you see, as to the qualities a true woman should possess, and in my folly I gave them all to Dora Fane—to the picture I mean, that night and day lay upon my heart.”

Steven’s voice had softened to its old tremulous, pleading tone; and Katharine’s bowed head sank lower still. After a minute: “Well, I came back,” he went on, more calmly, “came back, and you know the rest! I met poor Miss Dora, and I felt that I was just as indifferent to her as to any woman I had ever seen in my life, I met——”

“Oh, go on,” cried Katharine, as he hesitated. “Let nothing be omitted from your story. You saw the original of the picture, and found that she did not possess the fine qualities of your beau ideal. Is that what you would say?”

“I saw the original of the picture,” said Steven, “fairer than I had thought to find her, gracious, kind, and with a voice sweeter,

if that could be, than her face—but all on the surface! A woman of the world, a woman to lure men on with her beauty alone, living for herself and for her own vanity, excellently suited, I've no doubt, for the position of life she is going to marry into; and so—you know after what death pangs! my love, my reverence, not my madness, has passed away. The woman I dreamed of once is dead;" saying which, he took the locket that held Katharine's photograph from his breast. "I have no right to wear her picture. The real Dora, God help her! is all I have got to think of now." And as he spoke, quietly, not without dignity, Steven Lawrence put down the locket on the mantelpiece, and walked a step or two away from Miss Fane's side.

If he had raised his hand to strike her, the blow could scarcely have caused her humiliation so intense as thrilled through poor Katharine's heart in this moment. She had been accustomed hitherto to the way in which men of shallower passions, of finer breeding than Steven's, take their doom; to being told that in spite of her cruelty, she would ever remain an ideal of all earthly and divine perfection; her picture the dearest possession left to console the sufferer—with other like

phrases in use in drawing-room love. This plain, coarse avowal that while Steven's "madness" for her remained unaltered, his blind respect, his chivalrous reverence for her was over, seemed to her the cruellest of insults. Yet still—incomprehensible mystery of love—Katharine Fane knew, even in the depth of her bitterness, that it was more possible to forgive him *so*, than if respect, if reverence, had continued intact, and a fairer face than hers had led his senses captive.

"I never gave you my picture, Mr. Lawrence. Remember, it has been of your own free will that you have chosen to wear it. Nothing is easier than to take it out. See, I bear no malice! I will do it for you myself."

She took up the locket, raised its glass, and in another instant the photograph, Steven's companion day and night for so many months, was torn neatly into four pieces, and thrown into the fire-place. Just as the sacrifice was completed came the patter of Dot's high-heeled slippers along the passage, and Katharine, in a sort of guilty confusion, and not remembering what she was about, hid away the locket in her hand.

"I am so sorry I couldn't come

sooner !” cried Dot, as she tripped in, quite a picture of white muslin and cherry-coloured bows, and with a Mimi Pinson plate of lace on her short fair hair. “ Oh, Kate is here ! then I know you haven’t missed *me*. How d’ye do, dear Steven ?” Dot was not a foolishly-shy person, and held up her face to her lover no more embarrassed by the presence of a third person than if she had been awaiting a kiss from Uncle Frank. “ Now mind. —I shall be horribly, dreadfully angry unless you tell me this instant every word you have both been saying.”

It was a plain gold locket that Steven had bought, second-hand, from the store of a Jew pawnbroker in Vera Cruz ; a locket whose intrinsic worth was certainly not more than twenty-five shillings, and throughout the whole remainder of that day Katharine Fane felt sorely puzzled what to do with her unlawful possession. To return it empty to its owner was a cruelty that, whatever his deserts, she could not practise towards him ; give it to Dora her heart would not let her ! So the only course left practically open seemed to be, to keep it herself. Some day, she thought, when Steven’s senses had returned, she might give it to him ; he would

be Dot's husband then ; and perhaps with her own picture in it once more, as a peace-offering. He might be willing to take back in friendship what he had flung away from him in love !

And when night came and she was alone, Miss Fane opened an inner drawer of her trinket-case, and, quite apart from diamonds, pearls, sapphires, and the rest of Lord Petres' gifts, hid the locket away. A branch of withered wild roses lay at its side.

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CHAPTER XI.

MARRIED.

THEY never met alone after this day. Every forenoon, at the same hour precisely, Steven arrived, to go through his courtship; occasionally was made to stay for lunch; once or twice came, by set invitation, to dinner. But Katharine saw him alone no more. She was thoroughly gracious to him, in her manner, before Dora; with a generosity that alternately angered and stabbed him with contrition did her utmost to bring out whatever good there was in her cousin's character in his presence; whenever it chanced that strangers were by would show, by a sweet and unaffected familiarity towards him, that Dora's own relations, at least, saw no misalliance in the approaching marriage. "If she has no heart," he would say to himself, every time he quitted her, "she is so perfect an actress, has a tact so excellent in her way of imitating one, that

a man might pass his life in heaven at her side, and never be sensible of the deficiency." The very quality, in short, which he had held to be the canker, the flaw of her nature, becoming a new and cogent reason for him to love her the more.

The engagement, happily, was not a long one. The business arrangements connected with the marriage were soon over, Steven absolutely refusing to touch a farthing of his betrothed's small dowry, and insisting that capital and interest should be left in her hands; and after this (a week in London having sufficed to buy more silks and laces than there seemed a possibility of ever wearing in Ashcot) Dot began to think that she need not make the poor fellow wait any longer. October was a pleasant month in Paris—cool, yet sufficiently summer-like to be out of doors all day; it was an idle time, too, dear Steven said, on the farm, and everything at Ashcot would be ready by then for her reception. As well let the first of October, a fortnight from the present time, be fixed on for the wedding day. Laces and silks being temporarily in abeyance, the question of wedding-guests was next an all-important one to Dot's mind. Katharine's advice was to keep the marriage absolutely


private; none but members of their own family present, or such friends of Steven's as he chose to invite. But to this Dora would not listen. "It looks exactly as if we were ashamed of it," she said. "When you are married to Lord Petres you may have a hundred guests, or six, and the world will call it right. In marrying a man like Steven, unless I take up a position at first, show that I mean to raise him to my class instead of sinking to his, no one will ever visit me at all. I am quite determined to have the Ducies for bridesmaids, and Lady Haverstock and everybody else at the breakfast. As to asking any of Steven's friends," added Dot, "it is out of the question. I have spoken to him about it, and he wishes to leave every arrangement regarding the wedding in my hands."

And so to poor Katharine fell the task of bringing the Ducies of Ducie, proud old Lady Haverstock, and "everybody else," together at the wedding-feast of Steven Lawrence of Ashcot! A less gifted tactician would certainly have failed in the attempt. The older people remembering the Lawrences as plain working yeomen—at a time when yeomen, as a class, existed—would almost as soon, under ordinary circumstances, have

thought of appearing at the marriage of a day-labourer. Younger ones looked upon Steven much as they looked upon Mills the horsedealer, or any other of Lord Haverstock's boon-companions in the village; and had cards or invitations been sent out in the usual fashion it is doubtful whether a single acceptance would have been the result. Katharine's line of diplomacy was this: She rode over alone one morning to see Lady Haverstock, had a long confidential talk with her about the marriage, then just as she was leaving, asked the old lady, affectionately, if she would be present at it. "Steven Lawrence is not, I dare say, what these good people—people, half of them of yesterday themselves! would call a gentleman," said Katharine, "so we shall have a very quiet homely wedding. Lord Petres, I hope, will be here for it, and his sister, if Lord Scudamore is better. Dear Lady Haverstock I hope *you* will please Dora and mamma by coming to the church to look at us?"

Lady Haverstock, with Katharine holding her hand and waiting for her reply, could of course do nothing but accept: and after this no further invitations were sent out. People began to talk, to wonder, to feel angry that they were not asked. "Lady Haverstock

and her son, and Lord Petres," said the Miss Ducies of Ducie, "and the Countess of Scudamore, and to leave *us* out! We had better go and call. It would be very disagreeable to have any coolness with the Hilliards now"—that Katharine Fane was engaged to marry Lord Petres! So the Miss Ducies came to call, asked in tones of interest about Dora's wedding dress; were quite anxious to know Mr. Steven Lawrence; had seen him several times with Lord Haverstock, and thought him so like the picture of the Emperor of Austria—was it possible Miss Fane did not see the likeness? finally were told by Katharine that they might come to Clithero church arrayed in natural flowers and white muslin dresses on the first, if they chose. With Lady Haverstock and her son as guests, and the Miss Ducies as bridesmaids, the difficulty now was rather whom to leave out than whom to invite. Everybody accepted: everybody, if they did not think Steven like the Emperor of Austria, thought him a young man of decided promise, a young man whose future after he married Dora Fane would lie in his hands; and as the day approached, Dot, with an exultant heart felt that a dozen of the most exclusive people in Kent, people many of whom had not gone



to Arabella's wedding would be present at hers.

A dozen or fifteen irreproachable people as wedding guests; Lord Haverstock—for this Dora herself had intrigued—as best man; with Katharine, the two Miss Ducies, and old Grizelda Long, the Phantom, as she was more generally called among her friends, as bridesmaids. . . But as Grizelda is destined to play a part of greater importance than that of bridesmaid in Steven's marriage, she must be allowed to make her bow with formality on first appearing before the foot-lights.

Who was Grizelda Long? Had she a mother—had she a brother? No one knew. She had gone on leading her phantom nomadic existence until people had ceased to speculate whether she had human relationships or not; had ceased, indeed, to regard her otherwise than as a dispensation of Providence, an ultimate fact incapable of solution or analysis. A dreaded presence which even a woman like Mrs. Dering had not the courage to expunge from her balls and At Homes—it was at wedding festivities, above all others, that the face of Grizelda Long (like the flower-crowned death's-head of the Egyptians) was certain of being seen.

The clerk and pew-opener at St. George's knew her well; to the young men from Gunter's she was familiar as one of the plaster-of-paris devices upon their own cakes. If a bride was making a good marriage Grizelda must not be left out, because the poor dear creature had really been so indefatigable in running about to match silks and spur on milliners for the trousseau, and besides, would have *such* malicious things to say unless bought off with a bridesmaid's locket. If a bad one, Grizelda must come because she was just one of those amphibious creatures, those human connecting links, who are so convenient, as padding, or buffers, to put between different strata of guests at a breakfast-table. You might have slipped Grizelda in between a bishop and the most scandalously vulgar of the bridegroom's relations, and by virtue of her apologetic mild flatteries to his lordship, her mysterious latent affinities with the abominable new cousin—have offended neither. What were Grizelda's means of life? There were people who had been intimate with her for a dozen years or more who could not answer that question. It was whispered that, somewhere Knightsbridge way, there existed a modest establishment, half-lodging, half-boarding

house, an establishment held together by a forlorn old maid or two, and chance Indian widows, and of which poor Grizelda was, in fact, the chief. But these were whispers only. No ordinary human creature could for certain have discharged these domestic duties and at the same time have haunted every ball and wedding and flower-show about town as did Grizelda. And many persons held it was but the weird ubiquity, the unholy will-'o-the-wisp-like habits of the creature in pervading, or appearing to pervade, every house of every one she knew at once, which first called the Knightsbridge legend into existence.

No one could, with an approximation to accuracy, fix the epoch at which Grizelda first appeared on the earth. Middle-aged matrons, mothers of tall boys and girls, could distinctly remember her flitting to and fro, match-maker and match-marrer, by turns, in the love-affairs of their youth. Accurate old gentlemen, when closely questioned, would not distinctly swear to any given year in which Grizelda was *not*. The young and flippant openly believed her to be a sort of unshriven houseless soul, a wandering female Jew who had roamed, partnerless, through ball-rooms, an unmated bridesmaid

through weddings, from the beginning of time. Grizelda pursued you throughout a whole London season. For three months you could scarcely go to a ball without seeing the well-known battered wreath, the well-known battered face peering, eager-eyed, through folding-doors, and up and down staircases after the young men who had promised (not always unsolicited) to give her a dance, and when the time came, fled ! And you went to the Rhine or Paris and found her there—"travelling with friends," Grizelda would say ; in reality, part-dragonness, part-courier, to some young woman, or women, not quite strong-minded enough to travel alone, and who found the good Grizelda, whether as foil, blind, interpreter, or friend, useful. There was no need to be troubled with conversation-guides or polyglot washing-books when you had got dear Grizelda of your party. For the purposes of luggage or the laundry she could speak any amount of execrable foreign tongues ; and then, it was so impossible to offend Grizelda ! And she was so indefatigable in beating up or making acquaintance for you in continental towns, so good in sleeping up five pair of stairs, or on a sofa, or in going to church when every one else was tired, or in fighting over the

hotel bills, and it would be so easy to have done with her when you got back to town ! This last clause, however, while wishing to pay every other tribute to her virtues, I am disposed to dispute wholly. When Miss Long had once fastened on a friend she generally held to him, and with no wavering grasp. You might ask Grizelda to your house and she would come, and malign you meekly to every one next day ; or you might not ask her, and she would malign you more meekly still, and regretting that your acquaintances were not *quite* what she cared to meet. But you could not have done with her. People who in the heart of a German forest or on the top of Mont Blanc weakly asserted such a thing to be possible would confess afterwards, in sackcloth and ashes, that they had reckoned without their guest. Snubbing only brought the Phantom with additional humility to your doorstep ; cutting was no more fatal to her than to an earth-worm : desperate under her persecution, if you laid a cruel hand on what in any other human being had been pride or self-respect, Grizelda would walk away, as unscathed as the daddy-long-legs who, in quiet unconcern, leaves one of his limbs still quivering under your finger !

Perhaps a little real honest kindness might have exorcised her, as holy water is said to exorcise other phantoms; but this poor Grizelda never got. People invited her; travelled with her; made every kind of use of her; gave her handsome presents; believed "she was good-hearted, and made mischief more from desire of bringing herself forward than out of malice." But no one liked her. Was this a proof of her demerits? If, instead of being lodged in that curiously unlovely tenement, Grizelda Long's thirst for action and dauntless courage had been the portion of a fairer woman, might not she—when she and time were in their youth—have been loved, and so done well? Turned into legitimate channels were not the elements of more than common worth in this restless, energetic, sympathy-craving nature that now had soured and hardened into what it was after long contact with poverty and the world? If the Knightsbridge legend had—as I believe it had—truth in it, did that tell no story of pathetic under-currents in Grizelda's life? When the old face at which Cornet Lightfoot (invited to the ball through Grizelda's agency) had laughed with his gay little partner of seventeen last night—when the old face that had looked so incongruous

under its flowers and in the gas-light got up in the early grey next morning to see after the poor menial duties of the household—that the charwoman had carried home no broken meats over-night, that the sardines and new-laid egg were ready for the capricious Indian widow, the stay of the house—must there not have been something almost heroic in its expression? The world has no time to make suppositions—to give credit for bushel-hidden or potential virtues. Grizelda Long was a bitter-tongued old maid who had once, centuries ago, managed to get herself into society and had miraculously kept her head above water ever since: a creature plain to look at, disagreeable to be with, but whom even Mrs. Dering was afraid to leave out of her parties—a creature, in fine, whom every one shook hands with, and whom no one liked! The hard work in the Knightsbridge boarding-house, the courage that could bravely wear a silk dress over an empty stomach, the craving to be up and doing that, in default of other excitement, would make poor old Grizelda head a band of school-children on Wimbledon Common, or collect money from house to house to build a pauper church in St. Giles's. . . . None of these things did the world see or take into

account. Even Katharine Fane, of all human creatures the aptest to divine whatever real good lay in man or woman, never could bring herself to see aught but the unloveliness of Grizelda Long!

“Of course every one you wish to have at your wedding shall come,” she said to Dora, “even the Phantom; but why not ask her as a guest only? All your other bridesmaids will be young, and tolerably good-looking, remember. Could anything be more grotesque than to see Grizelda Long in white muslin and with natural flowers in her hair, walking at the side of little Alice Ducie?”

But Dora was obstinate. If Grizelda came at all it must be as a bridesmaid. Grizelda would be horribly affronted at finding herself ranked with Mrs. Ducie and the other elderly wedding guests; and Dora would run no risk of forfeiting her goodwill. Grizelda knew numbers of people in London and Paris; knew people all over the world; and the bride elect, looking forward already to sometimes quitting her husband and Ashcot, foresaw that the day might come in which even the Phantom could be of use to her.

That day, alas! came sooner than Dora herself expected.

Golden September waned. There were bright soft noons, and glorious autumn sunsets, and nights with a ring of sharpness in the air, and a yellow harvest moon shining above the hazy foreland, and showing the low farm-walls of Ashcot, white and distinct, across Clithero Bay. Never had days and nights seemed, each as it passed, so slow to Katharine ; yet never, collectively, had they sped on so quick to an undesired end. The evening of the thirtieth came : for the last time she stood in her old place on the terrace : for the last time thought over the bitter-sweetness of the “ day that was dead ! ” Then came a few hours’ broken sleep, a feverish dream of some wedding party, in which she could never tell whether Lord Petres or Steven was the bridegroom, and where now Dot, now the Phantom, now Alice Ducie, but never herself, stood before the altar, veiled, and in orange-blossoms ; and then Katharine Fane came back abruptly to the truth ! found the sun shining, and Dora standing by her bedside, and remembered, with a shudder, that it was Steven’s wedding-day.

“ A beautiful dry day ! ” cried Dot, as much excited about the weather as if she had been going to a flower-show or a garden party. “ Get up quick, Kate. I find Heath has

sent my wreath too big after all, and I won't trust any one but you to alter it."

"Dear Dora!" said Katharine, holding out her arms to her cousin, "I'm so glad that the sun shines to-day."

"So am I," said Dora, with sincerity. "An umbrella and over-shoes would spoil the prettiest bride in the world!"


Millinery, even on her marriage-morning, was the note that ever ran through all Dot's emotions. Honestly, I don't believe she remembered Steven's existence, until she saw him waiting for her at the altar, so taken up was she in the white satin and wreath, the veil and bouquet, and Honiton to which, from her point of view, the bridegroom was but an adjunct. And Katharine must do everything for her! Dora's poor narrow heart hated Mrs. Hilliard's maid, with a hatred dating back from the time when this woman had altered the Parisian silk dress for little Kate, and would neither let her nor Mrs. Hilliard see her until she was dressed. "'Tis the last thing you will ever do for me, Kate," she said, as Katharine fastened on her veil and flowers. "I should have detested myself if any hands in the house but yours had dressed me to-day." And so difficult to please was Dot, so scrupulous about the folds

of her veil, the arrangement of the little baby curls, the exact height at which her wreath must be placed upon her forehead, that Katharine had scarcely had time for more than a glance at her own face, white as the dress she wore, in the glass, when the Squire knocked at the door, and called out cheerily that the carriages were waiting, and if Dora meant to be married to-day she had no time to lose.

It was not a large wedding after all. Lord Petres had not yet returned to England, neither did his sister make her appearance—hence, such people as were left out regretted that those who went should have been invited by Miss Fane under false pretences. Mrs. Dering, as Dot had foretold, was suffering too severely from one of her old headaches to be able to do more than send her best wishes and a tea-pot and service, something really useful, to the bride. The Squire, Dora, and Katharine went in one carriage, the three bridesmaids in another; and at the church, for Steven had expressed no wish to be additionally married at Shiloh, Lady Ilaverstock and her son, with about a dozen other guests, met them. Not a large but a very charming wedding, public opinion said: did a wedding ever take place in the world that

was not called charming? A lovely bride, a handsome bridegroom, young Lord Havestock as best man, the three prettiest girls in Kent as bridesmaids (long practice had taught poor Grizelda to bow her face down over her bouquet, and generally keep herself quiet and unseen), and no inauspicious tears or emotion of any kind to mar the effect of the ceremony.

When it was over, Steven, who throughout looked like a man in a dream, had twice to receive whispered admonitions from the old clerk before he collected himself sufficiently to offer his arm to his wife, and take her away to the vestry. "Very naturally," said the Clithero people, who were looking on from the body of the church. "Master Lawrence was a dissenter, and didn't know the ways of the gentry and the church-people." And not all the hand-shaking and congratulations he went through when the signing of names was complete seemed sufficient to rouse him to a sense of his happiness. Was he really overcome—not master of his own feelings—or only shy, poor fellow, and without manner? the people wondered who had honoured him by attending his marriage. When the bride and bridegroom left the church the crowd of village-people who were



assembled outside gave a cheer, but it was not a very hearty one. Steven Lawrence marrying a niece of the Squire's lady was an event so out of all established order or precedence as to have upset the whole mental equilibrium of the parish : and the cheer rang neither with the hearty respect men would have shown had Dora Faue married a gentleman, nor the honest frank sympathy they would have felt for Steven had he chosen his bride from his own class. He nodded to such of his old friends as he saw, all of whom looked hot and uncomfortable under the salutation ; then Katharine's school-children came forward, dressed in white, to strew flowers—a custom never seen before in Clithero and set down at once as black papistry : and after this Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence entered the Squire's carriage and drove away.

“It went off beautifully, did it not ?” cried Dot, much as if she had been speaking of private theatricals or a dinner party. “But you were so absent, Steven ; I am not sure that you saw whether I looked well or not.”

“Indeed, I saw you, my dear,” said Steven, turning to her with a curious sort of pity on his face ; “I saw you, and thought I had never seen you look so pretty before.” And he took her hand, the bride first carefully

transferring her bouquet and handkerchief to her lap, and gave it a grasp which almost brought the tears into Mrs. Lawrence's eyes.

What he answered was strictly true. He *had* looked at her as she walked up the aisle upon the Squire's arm: the brilliant skin, the great dark eyes, the golden baby-locks, all softened and made youthful under the bridal veil: and had thought he never saw poor Miss Dora look so pretty before. He had likewise wondered at what period of his life the vision of that doll-bride could have appeared before his eyes already. And in an instant—the wedding-party watching him, marvelling to see with what quiet good-breeding the yeoman bridegroom awaited his bride—memory had answered the question. Once, years ago, in New Orleans, he had gone in with some of his mates to see a show of dwarfs. “The real original General Lilliput and his family,” said the advertisement: at all events, an assemblage of mature human-creatures between three and five feet in height. And of this pitiful troupe the principal lady had been dressed as a bride: “The same dress,” according to the showman, “that she wore on the occasion of her marriage with the illustrious General.” Well, the tiny hands, the consequential walk, the floss-silk

hair, the too-pink cheeks of this poor morsel of humanity all came vividly back before Steven as his bride approached the altar : the resemblance heightened when he heard Dot's voice, harsh and disproportioned as had been the small lady's in the New Orleans show, pronouncing the first necessary "I will." And the grotesque likeness so haunted him throughout the ceremony, that even when he was on his knees receiving the rector's blessing, it was by an effort that he brought himself to feel the sacredness of the place and of what he was about and not smile. During these ten minutes, which hung a millstone round his neck for ever—which separated him irrevocably from the woman he loved, all he remembered was that show in New Orleans ! all he felt was the absurd outward incongruity between himself and the kneeling baby of thirty at his side ! Probably if some of the men who have gone to execution so staunchly could have recorded their experience when it was over, they would have told us it was a little stain upon the axe, an accidental irregularity of the cord, which occupied their senses at the last.

"I only looked at you once," said Dot, after a time, finding it necessary, if conversation was to be kept up at all, that she

should start a subject, "and then, Steven, I declare I thought you were smiling. But perhaps it was my own agitation—you know I saw through my tears."

"Your—your tears?" answered the bridegroom, absently: a sharp turn in the road had brought into sight the carriage immediately behind them—the carriage which held Katharine Fane . . . and after this neither of them spoke again till they reached the Dene.

"After all, what can one have to talk about?" thought Dot, leaning back, and resigning herself to visions of her travelling dress: "The situation admits of no subject of interest. My violet velvet suit—yes, I'm glad the day is turning chilly; nothing looks so English as velvet under a hot sun—violet toquet, white plume—Great heavens!" for the first time to-day the bride's heart beat quick: "I hope Williams has not packed my violet toquet away! Did I—did I remember to tell her I had changed my mind about wearing a bonnet?"

The breakfast went off after the manner of all wedding breakfasts. The bridesmaids of course ought to have taken their places in due form near the bride; but Lord Haverstock, who had charge of Katharine, got shy and blind at finding himself among so many young women, and led her to the seat where

she felt her white cheeks and trembling lips must be surest of notice; exactly opposite, that is to say, to Steven and his wife. Mrs. Hilliard—half imagining herself a bride again, in her silver-grey dress and delicate white-lace draperies—sat and shed tears, and murmured about “Dossy,” and glanced with hysterical meaning at Dora, until old Grizelda leant across with her smelling-salts and a sympathetic hope that Mrs. Hilliard would be able to command *her feelings*, and only think of the beloved bride’s happiness. The Squire, with real agitation, and real tears in his eyes, made a very bad speech; the rector, with professional rhetoric, a very good one. Steven, when he was called upon, said a few words, at least up to the average of bridegroom speeches. Lord Haverstock went through torture horrible to his mother to witness on behalf of the bridesmaids. Finally, Mrs. Hilliard looked at the bride, who rose, blushed, fluttered away from the table, and half an hour later was standing in the drawing-room (suit, toquet, plume, all complete) kissing her dear aunt Arabella, kissing the Miss Ducies, kissing Grizelda, kissing and being kissed by everybody amidst a multitude of farewells.

Well—who shall say how it chanced?—

just at this affecting moment of leave-taking the bridegroom, coming out of the dining-room, ran face to face against the principal bridesmaid, who happened to be crossing the hall, on some last errand she had to execute for Dora.

“Good-bye,” said Steven, standing still, and looking at her hard. “Say good-bye to me here, not before all those people.”

Katharine raised her eyes to his, and tried to speak, but could not get out a word. Her lips twitched : her hand turned cold and clammy, as Steven caught and held it in his own.

“Good-bye ; and the Lord pardon you !” he said, with a suspicion nearer to the truth than he had ever known before dimly breaking on him. “Katharine !” . . . and then a door close beside them opened. The hands that, save in friendship, must never meet again, were parted. All was over.

This was their last farewell. Katharine took her leave of Dora alone, in Mrs. Hilliard’s morning-room ; and, when the bride and bridegroom drove away, Steven looked in vain, among the crowd of people who stood at the hall-door to see the happy pair start, for her face.

The blood ran in his veins with fever-heat


as the carriage bore them along the quiet autumn-scented lanes towards the railway. He forgot "poor Miss Dora;" forgot that he was her husband; forgot everything but the trembling perfect lips, the clay-cold hand of Katharine Fane. If he might go back, he thought; hear her say, "I love you, Steven;" feel her arms round his neck, once—and then die! he were well off. And, even while he thought this, he found himself on the platform at the station, mechanically counting bonnet-boxes under his wife's orders, with the station-master, clerk, porters, signalman, all staring at him as though, by marrying the Squire's niece, he had become a sort of natural phenomenon, or curiosity. After this came the shriek of the engine: more excitement from Dora about bonnet-boxes; and then they were hurried into a carriage full (with a sense of relief he recognised this) of other passengers, and he knew that Katharine Fane and his love belonged for ever to the past, and that he had started on his wedding tour!

The tidal train, which would have taken them to Folkestone exactly in time to meet the boat, did not stop at the smaller country stations; so they had been obliged to go by the afternoon mail, and when they reached

Folkestone, there was still an hour and a half to spare before the steamer left. It was six o'clock; the pale October daylight nearly gone; and, after leaving their luggage at an hotel, Steven proposed that they should saunter out on the beach, to make the time pass.

"Ah—yes!" said Dot, not fond of walking at any time, and thinking especially at present of the dainty boots, the violet velvet, in which her journey to Paris was to be made. "It—it won't rain, I hope?" Then she put her hand, for the first time, under her husband's arm, and, somewhat silently, they went away together for their walk.

There had been rough winds for two or three days before in the channel; and, though it was dead calm now, the tide rolled in with heavy breakers on the beach. Nothing can well be mournfuller than the neighbourhood of the sea in weather like this; oppressive silence for a minute; then, one prolonged wild sob along the shore; then, silence again;—and a grey sky overhead! an expanse of grey, cold water stretching before you, dim and spectre-like, in the twilight! When they had walked some distance—miles it seemed to Dora, who was tortured by the shingle, and almost running



to keep pace with Steven's long stride—"I—I don't like the sound of the sea at all," she cried. "It looks calm, but I'm certain there is a heavy swell somewhere, and nothing makes me so ill as a swell." Dot entertained true French horror of the sea and sea-sickness. "Now, do you think I shall suffer dreadfully, Steven?"

Steven had not heard the first part of what she said, and stopped short. "Suffer? my dear, you shall never suffer, if I can help it!" he said, stooping down over her, and with a new, pitying kindness in his tone. Something at this instant; the pressure of her hand, perhaps: her faltering voice, for she was really tired and out of breath, had, for the first time to-day, reminded him that Dora was not merely a puppet in the wedding-show, but a poor, helpless, little woman, dependent on his affection for the happiness or misery of her future life! And all the manliness of his nature was stirred up by the thought. *She* was his wife. *She*, Dora Fane—not Katharine—had had the courage to love him before the world; to cast in her lot, for good or for evil, with his. "If I can shield you, Dora, you shall never know what it is to suffer again!" And he caught her: for it was dark, and they had wandered

far away from houses : and held her almost passionately to his breast.

“Oh—dear Steven !” cried Dora, in a stifled voice. “I know you will be everything that is good to me, only——”

“Only ?” said poor Steven, still holding her to his side. “Tell me, Dora ; let there be no secrets between us from the first.”

“Only my feather,” said Dora, putting her hand up to the velvet toquet. “You know, dearest, this is the hat I have got to travel in to Paris !”

CHAPTER XII.

BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM.

“WE are perfectly happy,” wrote the bride at the end of a week. “The weather is delightful, Paris full—I will tell you about dress when I see you—and Steven everything that is kind and good. What a pity the only place fit to live in on earth should be so expensive! My dear Kate, tell Uncle Frank *the whole* of his present is gone already, and our hotel bill not paid. To give you an idea of prices—bonnets, small as they are, cost sixty francs. Sixty francs for about three square inches of blond and tulle, and you can’t get one *under*! I don’t think, on the whole, dearest Steven is as pleased with Paris as I expected him to be.”

“And shows his sense too,” said the Squire, as Katharine read aloud this part of her cousin’s letter. “I’ll tell you what, Kate; if they were in any other place in the

world and Dot talked of cash running short, I should send some as a matter of course—I know very well Lawrence can't be over-flush of ready-money just now—but the best thing that can happen to them in Paris is—to be obliged to leave it. Sixty francs for three inches of tool!" cried the Squire, testily; "and what need will she have of tool at Ashcot, I should like to know? If her husband wants money to drain his land—and he'll never get a crop until it is drained—I'll help him to every shilling he asks me for; but I'll not help Mrs. Dora to three-inch Paris bonnets. Give her my love, Kate, and say we expect her home at the end of the fortnight."

The message was given; and five days later old Barbara received a letter from the new Mrs. Steven, to say that they would be back on the sixteenth. "Have something to eat in the house," wrote Dot, in a Napoleonic style that stirred Barbara's wrath to its very depths, "a raised pie or cold pheasant will do, as I can't tell you what hour we shall arrive; and make fires throughout the house, and keep the windows open." Every one of which commands Barbara, I need scarcely say, disobeyed flatly. Where was she to get raised pies and pheasants? The master's

favourite dish was cold boiled beef and pickles, and cold boiled beef and pickles should be ready for him. As to fires, Barbara had never lit a fire till November yet—except in sickness—and was not going to begin any such extravagance now. And for open windows! she supposed she knew when to open a house and when to shut it without being taught by Steven's fine-lady wife.

All the jealous pride of poor old Barbara's heart Dot, with her inherent want of tact, had contrived to ruffle in three or four careless lines; and when the evening of the sixteenth came, and the bride and bridegroom returned, Steven found, before he had been home ten minutes, that his wife and Barbara were enemies, and that his house, as in the old days of Mrs. Joshua and his mother, was to be a battle-field.

"You must make allowances for her, Dora," he said, when Barbara, her head erect as a war-horse, had set down a huge piece of beef before them, then stalked in silence from the room. "We must get some younger woman from the village, I see, to wait upon you, and in the meantime make allowances for Barbara. You will find the old soul honest, and true as steel, when you come to know her better."

"But because the old soul is true as steel is no reason that I am to eat beef as hard as iron!" retorted Dot. "My dear Steven, you may depend upon it old servants are mistakes. We had an old housekeeper at the Dene once, and Uncle Frank was always obliged to ask what day he might be allowed to give a dinner-party. No one values honesty more than I do," added Mrs. Lawrence, "but I value health more, and cold salt beef is just one of the few things I *cannot* digest."

"Then I will tell Barbara not to give you salt beef again, my dear," said Steven, going on with quiet good appetite at his own dinner. "She knows it is a dish I like, and I suppose got it to please me."

"After I had written and told her to have a pie, or game, or something light for me! and to have fires lit, and the windows open!" cried Dot. "Not one of which orders has she attended to! Steven, is that old creature to be mistress of the house, or am I?"

"You are to be mistress of the house, and of everything and everybody in it," answered Steven, with the good-humour of a man not vitally interested in his subject. "Barbara, as I need not tell you, will stay here always, and you must learn to manage her, my dear. Have what you choose for dinner, have the fires

lighted, and the windows shut or open—but please yourself in everything.”

And this was the tone of all his replies in future to his wife’s complaints. The sunny October weather turned before long to chill wind and rain, and Dot, shut up in-doors with only her finery to amuse her, and with old Barbara’s sullen face for companionship, became about as much bored as you could well imagine a bride to be. Steven was out of doors from morning to night, either at his farm-work, of which there was plenty on his hands, or shooting, or breaking in his horses for the coming hunting-season (“like a man possessed,” his wife would say to him, “you seem afraid to sit quiet for five minutes together with your own thoughts !”); but of an evening, and at his meals, he had very little save complaints to listen to. It was horribly dull. It was very strange none of the country people came to call. It was very selfish of Kate to choose this time to be away—Katharine was staying with Mrs. Dering at Brighton. For ten days Dora had sat in different lovely Parisian dresses of an afternoon, and not seen the face of a single visitor yet. What *did* make the parlour fire burn so badly? Was it necessary for her to walk all the way to Shiloh on Sunday, or

not ? And to these, and to a hundred more small discontents, the tone of Steven's answers was ever the same. He was sorry no one had called. He would have a new grate put in the parlour. It was not at all necessary for Dora to walk to Shiloh on Sunday unless she liked. And then away out of doors again the moment his food was swallowed, to remain there till next meal time, or until nightfall brought him perforce into the house again.

"If he would only contradict me sometimes !" Dot would think when he was gone. "Contradict me, and not get everything done with such horrible obedience, and—and try to look up some one—something in the shape of amusement for me !" Then, after gazing wearily through the wet windows at the wetter garden, she would go away to her room, to look over her dresses and her bonnets, and speculate as to her chance of wearing them, and wonder whether a wedding-ring and a house of your own, and a change of surname *did* make the country one jot more endurable or not ?

With November came a glimpse of brighter weather ; and at last, one fine afternoon, Mrs. Ducie of Ducie came to call at Ashcot. Dot, heroic in her small way, and


undisheartened by three weeks of fruitless labour at her glass, was elaborately dressed, embroidering at her parlour fire, when these, her first visitors, were ushered in by Barbara's grim voice. She had studied a new way of wearing her short fair locks, in Paris, which gave her more than ever the porcelain marchioness air. Her complexion, helped by friendly half-light, was beautifully carmine and pearl; her dress, her ear-rings, her brooch—all were in the reigning mode of Paris eccentricity, and all, worn by Steven Lawrence's wife at Ashcot, looked about as much out of place as old Barbara, driving in a fine carriage, would have looked in Rotten Row, or in the Champs Elysées.

Nothing could be more civil than the manner of Mrs. Ducie and her daughters. They were quite pleased to see Mrs. Lawrence looking so well; had no idea Ashcot was so delightfully situated; hoped they would soon see her at Ducie, but, if Mr. Lawrence was busy, she must not think about returning a formal visit—and, as soon as they left the house, fell to wondering at Mrs. Lawrence's want of taste and good-feeling in dressing as she did. A plain, neatly-made black silk, a sensible merino, would have looked so much better in that homely farm parlour; and oh,

what a pity Miss Fane, or *some one* who cared for her, did not tell the poor little woman to be less theatrical, less meretricious in her style of making-up !

So decided Mrs. and the Miss Ducies ; while Dora, watching their grand carriage and livery-servants, as they drove away, asked herself if the best county society was a prize, when it took the form of morning visits, of very great intrinsic worth, after all ! The Ducies had been perfectly civil, perfectly kind ; but Steven's wife was acute enough to detect the tone of patronage which ran through all the civility and all the kindness. They had visited her, as the Squire and Kate visited the other farmers' wives at Christmas, as Steven Lawrence's wife, in short, not as Lord Vereker's grand-daughter ; and the first tears Dora had shed since her marriage rose into her eyes at the mortification of this thought.

A day or two later, came old Lady Havestock, who stayed exactly seven minutes, and urged Mrs. Lawrence to take an active part in the village clothing-club, mainly on the ground that this charity was not confined to church-people, but open to all sects and denominations (" as if I care for sects and denominations ! " thought Dot). And after




this, one by one, the other people who had been present at her wedding-breakfast called or left cards ; and Mrs. Lawrence knew that her visiting-list was complete, as far as people of her own former class were concerned.

What was to be her amusement, her occupation in life ? she asked herself blankly. On the first Sunday after her return she had gone with her husband to Shiloh. Steven, remembering, perhaps, her former confessions of Evangelicism, and love for the “ Word unadorned,” seemed to take it as a matter of course that she should do so ; and Dora, for the moment, felt really diverted at the idea of appearing among all the plain old village Methodists in her new character. Any little bit of imposture was a diversion to her, so long as it wore the gloss of novelty ; and she chose her simplest dress and bonnet for the occasion, and pinned a flower in her waist-belt, and tripped into Shiloh at Steven’s side, with a Methodist hymn-book in her hand, and sang at the top of her voice in the hymns, and, indeed, played the whole part out very prettily. This was well enough for once. Next Sunday she went again, but the situation had lost its piquancy. The congregation sang through their noses ; the

close air gave her a headache; the old minister's sermon lasted an hour. Could people be expected to go to a place of worship where there were sermons an hour long, and no convenience whatever for falling asleep?

And this Shiloh experiment was repeated in a dozen different forms in her secular life. For once she played at going through dairy-work—actually printed a tiny pat of butter with her own hands; for once she gardened; for once sorted the house-linen; for once went out about the farm with Steven—and every time was amused: and every time when she attempted to go through the same thing again, found some excellent reason for being worn out with fatigue in five minutes. To make a human being who has detested the country for fifteen years take to it with goodwill at thirty, the miracle of love would be needed. And no such miracle worked for Dora! It was her fate, she felt, always to fall into the path of life for which she was least suited. In a hundred other positions—in any other position—she began to think, she would have done better, would at least have wearied herself less. Why, the lives of the washing girls in the Faubourg St. Marceau seemed a bright, a varied lot when she looked



back to it (autumn rain against the window, and only the burring tick of the old kitchen clock to interrupt her thoughts) from her lonely parlour at Ashcot. Beating clothes, winter and summer, in the cloudy waters of the Bièvre might not be in itself a genial employment; but at all events those bands of French girls beat in company, and chattered of their lovers, and laughed gaily as they worked, and had their balls on Sunday, and society and some kind of excitement all the days of the week. The lot of people on the stage had ever seemed to Dot one with which, despite its hard work and scanty pay, she had been well contented. And the life of a woman of the world like Mrs. Dering—a life with money, good position, society, operas, balls, fashionable church-going—ah, how easy it would have been to *her* to be a good wife and pleasant hostess, and admirable member of society, in a position like that! Anything but solitude, absence from human faces, remoteness from the show and noise and movement of the world. Anything but the self-contained, unbroken life which, in these early days of marriage, a young wife, if love be in her heart, wishes so fondly, so jealously to prolong!

Thus went by the first few weeks of Dot's

new existence. She possessed too little depth of feeling to be really and acutely unhappy. The coldness that Steven's patient kindness to her so thinly masked gave her slight concern; the consciousness of her own chill and bankrupt heart did not corrode her peace. Her life was dull—duller even than it had been before her marriage; this was all.

And still, and while she would run a dozen times a day to meet her husband with a kiss, and while she had spoken to no younger man than old Mr. Lyte the minister since her return to Ashcot, Steven's future rival already existed in Dora's imagination. "If a man of my own class, of my own ideas had married me," was her constantly-recurring thought, "rich or poor, loving or not loving him, I should at least have some society, at least have the possibility of amusement before me yet."

And although she never, even to herself, admitted that it was so, the man of her own class and of her own ideas meant—a man like Mr. Clarendon Whyte.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUT OF TUNE !

MEANWHILE Mr. Clarendon Whyte himself was walking about the Brighton cliff, beautiful as ever, with faultless gloves, Hyperion locks, and perfumed cambric, or taking his varied drive from Hove to Kemptown, and from Kemptown to Hove, in that mail-phaeton with its pair of roans, for which no man has yet known how Clarendon Whyte paid—perfectly oblivious that such a person as Dora Lawrence existed.

If, as Dora to the last hour of her life believed, he had really cared for her before Arabella adroitly turned his affection aside, it must be conceded that Arabella had effected the work of alienation thoroughly. Mr. Clarendon Whyte was just as devoted an adherent to the Dering household here at Brighton as in the days when Dora shared, or believed she shared, his attentions in town ; rode with Mrs. Dering when the

General was too gouty to mount his horse ; walked with her when the evening air was too sharp for the General's asthma ; drove out her eldest boy twice a week in his mail-phaeton, and dutifully ate all such meals as he was invited to eat in Mrs. Dering's house. The world still observed its old charitable reticence on the score of this friendship ; chiefly, no doubt, because Mrs. Dering was one of those women about whom there *can* be no scandal of moment, a little, perhaps, because Clarendon Whyte's poverty shut him out from the surveillance of mothers of families—the class from whom handsome young matrons have ordinarily most to dread. It was, when one came to think of it, a very natural intimacy. Mrs. Dering was a thoroughly exemplary wife to the most disagreeable of old husbands. General Dering himself had grown quite fond of the young man's society. And so, when Miss Fane came down to Brighton about ten days after Steven's marriage, the first person she met was her adversary, Mr. Clarendon Whyte—Mr. Clarendon Wyte still received as a daily visitor, still installed in his post of laquais de place, as of old, in her sister's establishment.

“And where is the city heiress, then ?” asked Katharine, the day after her arrival.

"I had hoped Mr. Clarendon Whyte was married—gone and buried out of sight for ever—ages ago."

"The city heiress has proved faithless," answered Mrs. Dering, placidly, "if, indeed, she ever had any existence. I wrote you the tale as it was told to me; and whether it was true, or only 'ben trovato,' Kate, we ought to be thankful for the effect it had on Dot. I was always afraid the poor little thing really liked Mr. Whyte in her heart."

"A pity she married Steven Lawrence if she did," said Katharine, bluntly. "No woman who had cared for Clarendon Whyte could love Steven, I am very certain."

"Love!" repeated Mrs. Dering, with the slightest possible sneer round the corners of her well-cut mouth. "My dear child, do you suppose for a moment Dora would have married any man for love? It would have been bad for Steven—are we all to call Mr. Lawrence 'Steven,' by the bye?—if she had. With a man like that it is far better that whatever attachment there is should be upon his side."

"I disagree with you entirely," cried Katharine. "Why do we ever speak on subjects like these? We don't understand each other; we talk in different languages! I

think it is a shame, a degradation for Steven Lawrence, or for any man, to know that the woman who is to be at his side till one of them dies came there for any other reason than love !”

“ Well, Kate,” said Mrs. Dering, “ when you speak in that sort of way you certainly do use a different language to mine, or to that of any other reasonable being. Look round the world and say if all the happiest marriages you see are not those which began without a pretence of sentiment on either side. Sentiment is a very pretty thing, dear, and becomes you admirably, but it won’t wear—trust me ! A sense of what is right and fitting ; prudence, principle—above all principle—these are the only foundations for solid happiness in marriage.”

“ Principle, yes !” said Katharine drily ; “ but then, what do you mean by principle ? Selfish interest, expediency, worldly advancement, or what ?”

“ By principle I mean *principle*,” answered Mrs. Dering. “ Don’t let us attempt word-splitting on such a subject as this. You might almost as well ask me what I meant by right or wrong !”

But, unfortunately, just as Mrs. Dering had taken this lofty moral stand, the entrance of

Mr. Clarendon Whyte put a stop to the conversation; and ten minutes afterwards Katharine left the house, as her habit was when he entered it, and went out with her small nieces and nephews to build castles on the beach.

She found the children's society more welcome than any other during the whole of her visit to Brighton. Mrs. Dering, seeing with real concern that her sister was pale and spiritless, got up constant little impromptu dissipations for her amusement; and Katharine went bravely through them all. Dressed, and drove, and danced; yes, sometimes flirted even, as of old; then next morning, when she was with little Bell and Flossy on the beach, knew that these two hours of baby castle-building, and listening to baby tongues, were the only hours worth anything to her out of the twenty-four!

Until three months ago her affection for Mrs. Dering had been almost romantic in its girlish depth and warmth. She could see no fault in Arabella, could detect no leaven of worldliness in her character; could imagine no higher ideal to place before herself, when she should become Lord Petres' wife, than her sister. And now Mrs. Dering scarcely spoke without the sense, rather than the words, of what she said grating harshly on

Katharine's heart ! She recognised—taught by she knew not what new wisdom—the real nature of all which to her sister was happiness ; saw, with newly-opened eyes, the true picture of a loveless mercenary marriage ; and knew, with a shudder, that where Mrs. Dering found contentment, she, in the same place, would find despair. Successes in society ; the admiration, the respect of the world ; the companionship of empty-headed fools like Clarendon Whyte ; these—with such well-regulated affection as she had for her children—filled up the cup of Arabella's prosperous life. With General Dering she had scarcely more human sympathy than she had with his plate-chest. “ And if I was in such a position,” Katharine would take a bitter pleasure in saying to herself, “ If I was married to a man just not positively hateful to me, I would run away from him ! I would commit some great wickedness, and bring his life and my own to a crash, and glory in doing so ! But I would never live the mockery of a life Arabella does.” And then, after thinking these desperate thoughts, she would steal away upstairs to the nursery, take her youngest niece upon her lap, and hold her face down on the soft little baby head with a wistful, yearning tenderness,

the like of which not all her love for children had ever called forth in her heart till now.

"I have had my one chance of happiness in life," she would think an hour later, when she was dressing for a ride or dinner-party, and her mood had changed, "and let it go. No woman, I suppose, has that sort of love offered to her twice, and I must just take the lot that I have chosen and make the best of it. Run away from Lord Petres when I'm married to him? bring things to a crash? What utter folly! I shall become like Arabella, of course, in time, and be happy with the measure of Arabella's happiness."

And in the meantime her spirits grew more fitful and her cheeks paler; and people began to say that the beautiful Miss Fane was losing her good looks, and must take care she did not play with Lord Petres too long if she wished to marry at all. These waxen complexions always went, alas! in a day when they did go. The Brighton doctor prescribed steel; the General pompously proposing an addition of cod-liver oil. Mrs. Dering despatched a letter bidding Lord Petres come over to England without delay. "My dear Kate is not positively ill," she wrote: "but I cannot say that I like her looks, and I am afraid she is a little depressed about her-

self. If you were to come, even for a day, suddenly, and without letting her know that I have written, I am sure that it would do her good."

Lord Petres had by this time returned to Paris, having gone through his usual autumnal course of mineral waters at the different baths; and three days after receiving Mrs. Dering's letter he travelled over dutifully from Calais to Dover, and from thence to Brighton. Brighton, I should say, was the one spot on the face of the globe which he detested most. The glare, the east winds, the nearness to the sea, the cookery to be met with at the hotels; everything in Brighton disagreed with Lord Petres to the very last degree: and it would be difficult to imagine any object more miserable and less lover-like than the poor little fellow presented on the keen November afternoon when he drove up before Mrs. Dering's house on the East Cliff. An immense seal-skin wrapper entirely enveloped his small figure; a pair of seal-skin gloves were on his hands; the familiar half-shovel hat, without which Katharine had never seen him before, was replaced by a cloth travelling cap, the flaps of which were tied down closely round his melancholy white face.

He was ushered, still in his wraps, into the drawing-room where Katharine was alone at the piano, singing low to herself the same "Eurydice" in which Steven had interrupted her that morning at the Dene. "Lord Petres!" she cried, starting up, half inclined to laugh, half to cry in the surprise of seeing him. "Who in the world would have thought of seeing you? and in Brighton too!"

"I have taken every precaution," said Lord Petres; his slow solemn voice sounding more welcome, somehow, than it had ever done before to Katharine's ears. "And as I know that you are unprejudiced, Kate, I have ventured to present myself before you in my travelling-dress—armour, it may more justly be called, against the inclemency of the Brighton climate." Thus saying, Lord Petres took off his cap and gloves, and seated himself shivering before the fire. "If you will permit me," he remarked, after the usual kiss on the tips of Katharine's fingers, "I will, for the present, keep my great-coat on. I am obliged to observe the strictest care on account of the different mineral poisons which are at present in my system. You have not been to Vichy? My dear Katharine, the effects of the Vichy waters are admirable in themselves—Duclos underwent a

resurrection there—'tis the number of waters a man in my complicated state has to take after them that is the mischief. Vichy requires an after-course of Homburg, Homburg of Baden, Baden of Kissengen, and so on, until you become almost as much a walking pharmacopœia as if the physicians had had their way on you at home. Now tell me, perfectly frankly, how I look?"

How he looked? Any man but Lord Petres must have asked how *she* was; have noticed *her* pale cheeks; and Katharine felt grateful to her lover for his selfishness. Poor little Lord Petres! she did like him very dearly after all. Eccentric, selfish, hypochondriacal though he was, he was real; and reality, in the present sick state of Katharine's soul, seemed to her the very salt of earthly virtues. "I think you look decidedly better, Lord Petres. You have almost a colour."

"The east wind flushes me, Katharine. You could have mentioned no worse symptom than my apparent colour."

"Well, then, you are stouter. I am quite sure you are stouter."

"Thank you," said Lord Petres, with quiet resignation; "I wished to learn the truth, and I knew I should get it from your lips. The object of the whole of the waters I have

swallowed has been to reduce what you call my stoutness. They have failed. Let us talk of other subjects."

Katharine took a chair beside him, and they talked, or rather Lord Petres talked, of Vichy and Baden, the last shape in bonnets, and the last subject that he had been studying for his great work on social reform; the accustomed kind of small-talk which, from the first week of their engagement, had been the nearest approach ever made by Lord Petres to love-making. At last, Katharine as yet having borne little part beyond yes and no in the conversation :

"And so," remarked Lord Petres, with an amused little smile, "you did marry your cousin to the backwoodsman after all. Where are they? How are they getting on? On purely scientific grounds the future of those two singularly-mated persons will always be one worth watching."

"Steven Lawrence chose to propose to Dot, and Dot chose to accept him, as I told you in my letters," said Katharine, holding down her face. "I had nothing whatever to do with their engagement. They have returned to Ashcot. They spent their honeymoon in Paris, and, my cousin writes me word, enjoyed it wonderfully."

Lord Petres shook his head. "That theory about persons enjoying themselves wonderfully during honeymoons is one to which I have devoted a good deal of thought, and all my researches have irresistibly proved it to be a fallacy. I speak of men, you understand: to a certain class of women," said Lord Petres, "no legitimate opportunity of wearing a new dress every day is devoid of interest. But men! Now, why should any man—we will take the backwoodsman for an example—enjoy that first enforced tête-à-tête with his wife which bears, ironically one would think, the name of honeymoon? On what experience, what established fact in human nature, is the supposition based?"

"I—I can quite believe that Dora wrote as she felt," said Katharine, evading any general question about married happiness. "To be in Paris at any time, or under any circumstances, is Dot's ideal of human beatitude. Poor little thing! I really feel sorry when I think of her back in the country again."

"Sorry for her, or for her husband, or for both?"

Katharine did not answer, and Lord Petres looked attentively at her downcast face. "Ah," said he presently, "marriage, under

the most favourable auspices, is a very hazardous undertaking, Kate."

"Very," said poor Katharine, with an attempt at a smile.

"A much more hazardous undertaking than you thought six months ago?"

"Yes," she answered, not knowing what was to come next.

"I can tell all this from your face. You have been thinking more since I saw you last than you ever did before in your life, and the result of your thoughts has been to take away your colour and your spirits. Now, viewing the subject quite dispassionately, *do* you wish that you were free again?"

She looked up at him with a start. "Free! Lord Petres, am I to think—am I to understand?" she faltered.

Little Lord Petres put one of his white hands on hers. "Katharine," he said, "from the first moment of our engagement I think we have spoken the truth to each other. We will do so still. I have not come to Brighton at this time of the year without a cause. Two or three days ago I got a letter from your sister, in which she told me that you were ill, and that letter brought me here."

The blood flamed over Katharine's face. "I wish Arabella would let us take care of our own affairs!" she cried. "Should I not have told you myself if there had really been anything important enough to bring you here?"

"Well, Mrs. Dering seemed to think not," said Lord Petres, quietly; "and in all these matters Mrs. Dering, I am sure, knows best. You are looking ill, and, notwithstanding my own feeble state, it was right, no doubt, that I should come and see you. Now we will condense what is to follow. We won't have a long scene, like lovers on the stage. You are young, Katharine, and not in love with me; you have been telling yourself so often of late; and you care not one jot about my being pretty well off. Do you wish to have back your freedom?"

From the lips of any other man living Katharine Fane's proud spirit would have resented this question as the cruellest indignity: from Lord Petres she took it straight as it came from his heart: a heart which, however limited its compass, however encrusted with sybarite selfishness, was crystal to its very depths where honour and where integrity was concerned. During their whole engagement, this was the moment, perhaps,

in which Katharine Fane went nearest to loving him!

"You—you have asked me this too suddenly!" she stammered.

"Then take time to give me your answer," said Lord Petres. "I shall leave Dover by the last mail to-night (for I am travelling, Duclos with me, as men travel in Spain, and descend at no hotels on the road), and shall expect your answer, not later than four days hence, in Paris: expect it a little anxiously, as you may know, Kate."

She looked round at him with great tears trembling in her eyes. To lose the most trivial fealty that had once been hers was horribly bitter to Katharine Fane: to lose Lord Petres seemed the agony of death to her—now that Steven was lost too! "There is no affection for me in the world," she cried. "You . . . I did think you would be faithful to me always, and you wish already to give me up!"

She drew her hand away from him, and her voice broke down.

"Oh, dear me, *please* don't cry!" said Lord Petres, entreatingly, but turning away his head lest he should himself incur the risk of agitation. "I thought you did not care for me, Kate!—I thought it was only

right I should give you a chance of escape ; but *please* don't cry !”

“And please don't ever be so cruel to me again !” sobbed Katharine. “Not care for you, indeed ! Ah, Lord Petres, what should I have left to care for if you were to forsake me now ?”

. . . . “And so the scene does end like a scene on the stage !” said Lord Petres. “I suppose the playwrights know what they are about after all. Now, the next thing is, when are we to be married ?”

“Oh, that is quite another question,” said Katharine, smiling, but with the big tears still on her cheeks. “Because I refuse, in spite of yourself, to give you your freedom, is no reason I wish you to be married at once.”

“At once would be impossible,” remarked Lord Petres, gravely, and coming back from the unaccustomed region of emotion and love-making to that of plain matter of fact. “I have just hired an apartment for the winter from some father or uncle of Duclos—hired it at an extravagant price I know, from the way Duclos speaks of his relation's honour and principles ; but I had a serious suspicion the rascal meant to leave me unless I obeyed him, and 'tis but another form of raising

his wages. The apartment will suit me admirably for the present, but I need scarcely tell you, Kate, is only large enough for a bachelor establishment."

"So Tangiers will not see anything of us for this winter," said Katharine. "Do you remember poor papa's first and last attempt at social diplomacy? We decided, then, you know, that courtship was the brightest season of life, and that we would prolong the brightest season to the utmost. Let us be of the same mind still."

Lord Petres deliberated for a minute or two in silence. "Katharine," he said at last, "it is absurd to speak of courtship between persons who do not court, and absurder still to believe that any season of life can be bright to a man in my state of health. On referring to my diary this morning I found that we have been engaged exactly one year eleven months and twelve days. You have told me that you consider three years a fitting term for an engagement, and what I would propose is, that we should be married on the third anniversary of the day when—when the subject was originally mooted. This will be November the thirtieth. Now, have you any objection to be married on that day?"

"Not in the least. November the thirtieth seems to me as good a day as we can possibly fix," said Katharine, with a smile; the old feeling that they were two marionette lovers playing their little parts in a marionette comedy coming back upon her in full force.

"Then we may look upon the matter as definitely settled," said Lord Petres, rising. "There could not be a more favourable time than the present for bringing the proposal before Duclos," he added. "The scoundrel has been in a better temper than I ever knew him since he drank the Vichy waters, and, considering the way his relations are robbing me, it is possible he may consent to stay for a year, at least, after my marriage. This I will let you know. To-day is the twelfth. It will probably take a week for Duclos to deliberate. Well, by the twenty-first then, I propose that I will let you know his ultimatum."

"And if—if it should be unfavourable?" asked Katharine, as Lord Petres raised her hand to his lips.

"Then I shall have exactly eleven months and nine days in which to look out for his successor," he answered, with extreme earnestness. "I believe—indeed Duclos himself

says—there is one other artist, an Italian fellow, at present in Vienna, who might suit me, but 'tis doubtful whether a man in his position could enter upon a fresh post at so short a notice—more doubtful still whether I should live long in his hands. Katharine, God bless you! You will forgive me if I cover my head before opening the door?"

When Mrs. Dering came home at six o'clock from her ride, Katharine met her with the welcome intelligence that Lord Petres had been to pay them a visit, and that the wedding day was fixed. "It was very thoughtful of you to write to him, Bella," she said, looking up from the place beside the fire where she had been sitting alone in the twilight. You see, Lord Petres told me all about it, and I am very glad that I have seen him. It really was time that a term should be fixed to his misery."

"And when is it to be, then?" cried Mrs. Dering, radiant, and throwing her arm round her sister's shoulder.

"On the thirtieth of November, rather more than a year hence," said Katharine, quietly. "Lord Petres himself fixed the day."

Mrs. Dering's face of horror and disap-

pointment was a study. "You will play out this game of folly a little too long!" she cried, with more temper than it was her habit to show towards Katharine. "The thirtieth of *next* November! For my sake, please, never mention this ridiculous date to any one we know. If you don't intend to marry Lord Petres, Kate, and what has changed you so utterly of late I refrain even from guessing, it would be better for yourself to say so openly."

"Very likely it would," answered Katharine, with perfect humility; "indeed, I have been saying the same thing to myself for the last hour, ever since he went away. But there, Arabella, there is the sin of my character. I don't love Lord Petres, yet when he offered to set me free just now I felt that it would be pain greater than I could bear to give him up."

"He—offered—to set you—free!" exclaimed Mrs. Dering, repeating the words with a mechanical, frozen sort of horror.

"Yes, and if I had been true to him or to myself I would have taken the offer—honestly, generously as he made it!" said Katharine, clasping her hands together in a sort of passion. "But I couldn't. I couldn't bear to lose him. I've never been able to give up

any one just at the moment when it would be right and honourable to do so. I am like a miser, wanting to have all, but whose own barren heart can give nothing." She bowed her face down, and gazed with vacant tired expression into the fire.

"The real truth is, my dear Kate, that you want tone. Dr. Goodriche says so. Go and lie down now for half an hour—we have people coming to dinner, remember—and I will bring you a glass of sherry. You know what Dr. Goodriche said—"

"—About my taking a glass of sherry whenever I felt out of spirits!" interrupted Katharine. "I wonder how many dozen bottles I should drink a week if I followed his advice? What nonsense doctors are forced to talk sometimes! We might just as well have called in a carpenter because the piano was out of tune as have consulted poor Dr. Goodriche about me."

"And what *is* the matter with you, then?" said Mrs. Dering, with a desperate feeling that it might be as well to know as to guess the worst. "It would do you good to speak, Kate. I'm a great many years older than you, and I have learnt that there is a remedy for nearly every ill under the sun."

"I am out of tune!" said Katharine,

wearily. "Everything (except Bell and Flossy's voices) is a discord to me. I wake every morning, and know that there's a world full of love and a world full of pain and tears around me, and that I am a puppet in the middle of it all. If I died to-morrow where would be the loss? 'Katharine Fane is dead,' some one would say. 'Well, well, her good looks had begun to fade, poor thing!' And some one else perhaps, 'Ah, she was a woman who lived for her own vanity alone—a woman who never knew the meaning of the word love.' And by to-morrow he would have forgotten me."

"Who would have forgotten you, child?"

"Who? . . . Why, my imaginary mourner, of course!" cried Katharine, lifting up her face with a laugh. "My dear Bella, to think that you and I, of all people living, should surprise ourselves talking sentiment! I've been a little out of spirits, a little bored of late, and what I really do need is—what all spiritless, bored young women need, plenty of fresh air, and good, hard out-of-door exercise. Do men, when they happen to get hipped, want tonics, and sal volatile, and pity from their friends?" went on Katharine. "Of course not; because they don't sit over the fire, and think over their own mental

symptoms; neither will I. You and the General have been very kind to me, but I believe hunting twice a week, and walking with papa through the turnip-fields on the remaining four, will be a better tonic for me than all Dr Goodriche's skill and sherry. Don't think me ungrateful, Bella, but, if you please, I'll go back to Clithero to-morrow."

There was more colour on Katharine's face, more animation in her eyes that evening than there had been for weeks past.

"The fact is, Lord Petres was here to-day," Mrs. Dering whispers to her friends. "He came all the way from Paris, poor fellow, to pay us a morning visit, and I think—well I *think* I may say that the time for my dear Kate's marriage is definitely fixed at last."

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. LAWRENCE AT HOME.

ONE of the monotonous afternoons, which were Mrs. Lawrence's daily portion, had set in; Steven away at his work; the kitchen clock sending its heavy tick-tack, tick-tack, through the silent house, when Barbara threw open the parlour-door, her eyes cast up to the ceiling, an air of stolid protestation written upon her whole face, as the old servant's manner was when ushering in any of "Mrs. Steven's" morning callers.

Steven's proposed amendment of having a girl from the village to wait upon his wife had been rejected by old Barbara with mingled scorn and ridicule. As long as she lived in Ashcot there should be neither girl nor woman wasting and breaking about her kitchen. She had done the housework and the washing, the baking and the boiling when there were five souls ("and four out of them *full-grown*," said Barbara, with in-

cidental irony) to wait upon. If a train of servants was wanted to serve Steven and his wife now, the master could suit himself when he chose. And not only did Barbara refuse foreign help—foreign customs, “the common decencies of life,” according to Dot, neither anger nor softness on the part of her new mistress would bring her to accept. “You must put down your sleeves, and tie on another apron always, will you remember?” Mrs. Lawrence had said when, on the great occasion of Lady Haverstock’s visit, Barbara, busy with her bread, had unceremoniously walked in before her ladyship, her cotton sleeves pinned up above her elbows, her clean strong old arms thick in flour. “Open the door wide, not with a push, as you always do, and say the visitor’s name distinctly and respectfully.” Of all which undeniably good advice Barbara had taken precisely as much notice as of the first Napoleonic order about raised pies and fires in October. In former days when visitors called upon Steven’s grandmother, or later on, upon the first Mrs. Steven, no such fal-lals as announcing names were wanted. The mistress was sure to be busy in her kitchen or dairy, and, if the visitors were of sufficient importance to be shown into the unoccupied parlour, would go

in there herself—after a lapse of five or ten minutes' dressing—to receive them. Barbara had no notion of calling out folks' names, as if they were being asked in the parish church, to suit Mrs. Steven's foreign fancies. If they knew each other already, where was the good of it? If they didn't know each other, what did they come for? This kind of philosophy was so unanswerable that Dot, in despair, had ceased to argue further. Sullenly she began to acknowledge that there were a great many things she would have to accept simply under the guise in which Barbara chose to present them to her—visitors among the rest. As long as she lived she would probably never see morning callers ushered into her presence otherwise than by the push of a parlour-door; an old farm servant, her arms thick in flour or other discreditable compound, marching in, with tight lips, and a face set and hard as fate, straight before them.

On the present occasion Dora had expected to see no one more interesting than homely Mrs. Lyte, or perhaps the doctor's wife, who had not yet paid her wedding visit; and at sight of Katharine she almost jumped up in the air with joy. Here, at last, was a human creature in a well-cut skirt and jacket, with

the last shape of hat on its head ; a human creature fresh from the land of millinery and of the living.

" Kate—dear Kate ! I didn't expect you for a fortnight. How well you look—no you don't, you are thin and pale, but how well your dress suits you ! Silk serge, isn't it ? You may shut the door, if you please ;" this to Barbara, who, with coldly curious eyes, had stood to watch the cousins' embrace. " Horrid old creature, did she think we wanted her to stop and hear all we've got to say ? Oh, Kate, my dear, if you knew what I have to go through with that woman ; until I came I do believe Steven and she dined together in the kitchen—take off your hat . . . it's pretty, but not in the least like what they wear in Paris. When did you come ? How do I look ? Do you like the new way I do my hair ?"

" It changes you a good deal," said Katharine, with a slight tremble in her voice. " But I suppose people ought to look changed after they are married. I daresay it would have startled me more to find you looking like Dora Fane still."

Dora gave a profound sigh. " I don't feel like Dora Fane, I'm sure," she said, with a shake of the head. " Sit here, Kate.

I can't call it an easy chair, but alas ! it is the easiest the house possesses. Is Brighton full ? Is it true the English are beginning to take to large bonnets again ! If they are, they make a fatal mistake. Pieffort, herself, told me nothing larger than that," Dot held up her own diminutive hand, "will be worn this winter. But *is* it true ?"

The subject of dress lasted at least a quarter of an hour ; the bride insisting upon comparing notes, item by item, as to the respective fashions of Brighton and Paris, and this quarter of an hour gave Katharine time to shake off the first repugnance—I will make the confession for her boldly !—that she had felt on seeing Dora in Steven's house as Steven's wife.

"I was tired of Brighton," she said, when the subject of silks and serges exhausted, Dora at last began to question her about herself and the cause of her own pale cheeks. "The driving and walking on the cliff, the dressing and parading, and never being able to get away from people, from morning till night, is, to my mind, just the most monotonous life any man or woman could live. There is a hundred times more real excitement in the country than in town, if one knows where to look for it."

"If one does!" said Dot. "Kate, my dear, will you be kind enough to look round this room, and tell me the possible excitement to be derived from a life like mine? You hear that sound? tack, tack, tack, like some one driving nails into a coffin, well, that is the kitchen-clock, and that, with the sea moaning and roaring, or the rain pattering on the window, is what I have to listen to from the time I get up in the morning until I go to bed at night. Now look through the window. I declare," cried Dot, "Aunt Arabella was right! If I had gone into another county it would have been something—a change, at least. Here, there's no change at all, except that I look across from Ashcot to the Dene, instead of from the Dene to Ashcot. Excitement! I should like you to spend a week precisely in my place, and see if you would ever talk about excitement in the country again."

"I never could spend a week precisely in your place," said Katharine, a sudden flush of colour spreading over her pale face. "If I lived—lived on a farm like this, I know that I could make myself happy, because I would spend the whole of my life out of doors. When I am married," went on Katharine, resolutely, "I mean, if I have any

influence at all with Lord Petres, to be as much at Eccleston, and as little in London, as possible."

"And drive, and ride, and play at model farming, and superintend the restoration of your old chapel, and convert the poor, and keep a French cook, and have a house constantly full of people, when you don't go away to London or Paris? Ah! I should like that kind of country life, extremely, myself. But Lord Petres and Steven possess, you must remember, rather different incomes."

"I don't think money need make much difference in one's real enjoyment of life," said Katharine, "above all, of country life. But from what you tell me, you never stir out of doors, Dot. You condemn yourself to be miserable! Why don't you ride? Uncle Frank says that Mr. Law . . . your husband," she brought the word out with an effort, "has two of the best horses in the neighbourhood. Try to hunt a bit this winter or ride at least to see the meets, and if you are not strong enough to get about the farm on foot, buy a shooting-pony to carry you."

"Not I," said Dot. "I hate ponies—besides, what do I want to see on the farm?"

and I haven't the courage to hunt, even if it would divert me, which it would not. I have no spirits left, that's the truth. I don't believe the place agrees with me. Look at the paper above your head—mildew! and my bedroom is mildewed, and the whole house is mildewed! I've been hoarse ever since the day I came home." And Dot coughed dismally.

"And how did Paris amuse you?" asked Katharine with a genuine feeling of pity—for Steven—rising in her heart. "I hoped, from your letters, you were perfectly contented there."

"Paris," answered Dot, "was, as Paris always must be to me, delightful, even though I saw it under disadvantages. There's no doubt about it, Kate, Englishmen (and Steven, in spite of all his travels, is an Englishman, heart and soul) don't know how to enjoy Paris a bit."

"Don't they, indeed?" said Katharine, shortly.

"Not a bit! Just figure to yourself the first day or two we spent there!" Dot's face began to grow animated. "We went, of course, to some great expensive hotel, Rue de Rivoli, recommended by Bradshaw. Solemn dinner, surrounded by silent English

people at six, breakfast by ourselves, at a huge table, with a hundred and fifty empty cups and saucers ranged round it in the morning, then off, arm in arm, to see pictures and churches, as set forth by Galignani, and back again to solemn dinner and silent English people at six. *Dieu des dieux !*" cried Dot, falling back unconsciously upon one of the familiar profanities of her childhood, "what a Paris! A couple of dull rooms, looking into a court yard, a dull table-d'hôte dinner, and sight-seeing every day, tête-à-tête with poor Steven! Well, the third day was Sunday, and after a good deal of trouble I got him off to the Bois. It was a bright day, and there were bands playing everywhere, and numbers of toilettes to be seen. My own was pretty, Kate, that pale grey silk—you remember—corded, and trimmed with groseille, white bonnet, with little groseille feather. I saw that I was regarded as I walked, and felt happy—felt in Paris, for the first time! I told him so, speaking cheerfully, I suppose, as I felt. 'Dora,' said he, 'in the middle of the prairies or of the forest I never felt so utterly alone as I do at this moment.' Did you ever hear such an answer? Was it chilling, say, at the first moment since

our marriage that I had had a distraction?"

"I believe I can understand the feeling," said Katharine; but she looked straight into the fire, not at Dora. "Among the crowds of people on the Brighton cliff, I believe I have often thought the same thing myself."

"Well," said Dora, "I, for my part, am very commonplace and matter-of-fact. When I am alone I feel lonely, and when I am in a crowd—yes, without a soul to speak to—I feel I have a society. Don't think in all this, Kate, that I am saying one word against my dear Steven. He is an excellent creature, good and kind to me as he can be, only—about sixty or seventy years behind the rest of the world! Now I asked him once to take me to Mabilie (and all the world knows it is *en règle* to go there incognito, and with one's husband), and, unlike Uncle Frank, of old, he consented, not, in reality, knowing any difference between Mabilie and the Morgue. Well, we had scarcely entered, were just beginning to look on at the first steps of a quadrille, when he turned with a face of horror, and bore me off like a whirlwind out of the place. 'My poor little Dora! forgive me for taking you there,' he said; 'I took you, as you wished to go, in ignorance.' And he continued to talk about his own stu-

pidity, and to ask my forgiveness ; till I was sick to death of the very name of Mabile."

"And I like him—I admire him for it," said Katharine, looking up, with her cheeks aflush. "I don't know what sort of place Mabile is, but I admire Steven for these old-fashioned, simple ideas he has about what women ought or ought not to do. If a man of the world held them, one might think they savoured of hypocrisy or affectation : from him they are real. Try to understand him, Dot," went on poor Katharine, warming ; "try to appreciate the really noble parts of his character. He showed his . . . his love for you in this very care, this very delicacy, as to where he took you."

For a minute or two Dot looked thoughtful. "Kate," she said, at last, "you call Steven, 'simple;' so, as regards his knowledge of the world, do I ; and yet, will you believe me when I say that I don't understand his character one bit ? I think sometimes of all the men I have known—men even like George Gordon, whom I detest, or Lord Petres, who has never a word to say to me—and I feel that if I had married any one of them I should have had more in common with my husband—have understood him better than I do Steven. Now can you un-

derstand what I mean when I say that I never for one hour together feel sure of him ?”

“I cannot, indeed,” answered Katharine. “I should have said Steven Lawrence was a man of whom one might feel surer than of any other.”

“Well, *I* don’t,” said Dot, “and, what is more, I doubt if I ever shall. From the hour of our marriage he has been perfectly kind to me, in his forced, absent way (a dozen times a day, at first, he used to call me ‘Miss Dora!’). He hardly ever left my side in Paris. In every way that he could, he used to try to please me. All this I felt fully; and yet often—often, when he has been standing looking out at the window of the hotel, and I have watched his moody face, I have thought if he was *once* to break away, he was a man to go and lose every shilling he possessed at play, or get into a quarrel and kill some one—in short, commit any act of folly or desperation you like. You will call it a silly fancy; but if I was to wake some fine morning now, and find that he had gone straight back to America, and left me and the farm for ever, I should not be surprised. A feeling I can’t give a reason for,” cried Dot, “tells me his life isn’t enough for him;

that Ashcot, though he's never idle for a moment, suits him as little as it does me, and that his perfect good temper, when I complain about Barbara, or anything, arises less from contentment than from half-sullen, half-indifferent patience. In short, I don't understand him. We live under one small roof, but in different worlds. Voilà !"

The subject was dismissed, and Dot got out her embroidery, and talked of the elaborate capes and dresses she meant to work, trusting Providence might send her the chance to wear them, next summer; and of Barbara's shortcomings; and the horrors of Shiloh; and the visitors who had called and who had not called—the interests, such as they were, of her small world. And on and on as she talked, one image was ever present to Katharine—the image that Dot, in her unconsciousness, had made so clear of Steven's paralysed life—the moody-faced man turning round from weary gazing through the hotel window to call his wife "Miss Dora;" the man with every strong capacity for good or for evil, for keenest pleasure or keenest pain, forcing himself by work into a kind of lethargic patience; kind to the poor unsympathetic little creature who had married him, yet, under one small roof,

each living in their own widely-separated world ! Katharine saw it all—all the first act in this mockery of a marriage, which her vanity, her cowardice, had been the means of bringing about.

At five o'clock, to a moment, Barbara entered with the tea-things. "I did not ring," said Dot, looking up from the table, all strewn over and heaped up with embroidery and laces.

Barbara stood erect and silent—a rational being, performing her duty of bringing in the master's tea, but having no concern whatever with these two fine wax-dolls and their tableful of gewgaws and vanities. As she stood so, and while Dot pettishly found herself constrained with her own hands to make room for the tea-tray, Katharine, from her corner by the fireside, watched the old servant's face. It was a fine strong face, she thought. In spite of its present acid expression there was plenty of good human kindness about the firm old mouth and keen, deep-set grey eyes. "If I had been Dot, I would have made Barbara like me in three days," she thought. "If—ah, if Dot loved Steven, this woman could not keep from liking her for his sake!" And just then Barbara turned, and fastened on her a look

so piercing, so bitter-full of contempt, of passionate resentment—that Katharine's eyes sank abashed to the floor. In that moment it seemed to her that another human soul beside her own knew her secret, and despised her.

Tea at Ashcot was not a flimsy pretence, like the five o'clock tea of London ladies, but a meal; one of the four good hearty wholesome meals of the day. "We dine at other peoples' breakfast hour," said Dot, when Barbara had left the room, as if to apologise for the substantial plate of bread-and-butter, the seed-cake, the preserves, which the old servant had set out; "and as the solemnity they call supper does not occur till half-past nine, one really wants something now, and dear Steven *has* such an appetite!"

As Mrs. Lawrence spoke, a step—the lithe quick step Katharine knew so well—sounded on the gravel path outside the window. A minute later Dot ran forward, as the parlour-door opened, and Steven, who coming in from the dusk to candle-light could discern no object in the room, took his wife in his arms and kissed her.

"My dear Steven!" cried Dot, half-pretending to push him away, "don't you see

we have a visitor? Here's Katharine come back."

Miss Fane rose from her chair, and came forward smiling. The sight of that little affectionate demonstration had furnished her for the moment, she felt, with abundant self-possession. "How do you do, Steven?—you will let me call you by your name now? you did not expect to see me sitting by your fireside, did you?"

She held out her hand to him, chill as it had been at the instant they said good-bye on his marriage-day; and Steven held it—coldly at first; then, as his eyes grew accustomed to her face, with sudden, eager, clasp in his. "Why, you have been ill!" he said, as unconscious of Dora's presence as if she had belonged to another planet. "You are ill now—and I never heard of it."

There was such deep, such genuine, concern in his voice as he said this, that even Dot, the least sensitive, the least jealous of wives, could not help noticing it. "That is what I call a really cheerful greeting!" she cried. "Steven never takes a roundabout road in anything, I must tell you, Kate. If he thinks you look ill, he says so, as you perceive."

"Steven is quite right," said Katharine,

drawing back her hand and coming over to Mrs. Lawrence's side. "And, unless I mistake, Dot, you told me the same thing. I *am* ill—I mean I have been ill—I mean I don't think Brighton agreed with me."

Steven turned round sharply; walked away, his hands thrust into his pockets, to the window, and stood there gazing out, without speaking a word, at the darkness.

"That is his way," whispered Dot, getting on tip-toes to reach Katharine's ear. "Just as I told you he used to stand and stare out into the court-yard in Paris. Steven, my dear;" after a minute or two; "when you have quite done looking at nothing, perhaps you will be good enough to come to tea; Kate and I are waiting for you patiently."

He came obediently, and placed himself at his wife's side; Katharine at the other side of the table; and then Dot, who seemed in her old high sprits this evening, began to pour out tea and talk for everybody.

"It was so good of you to come to us the first day of your return, Kate. Aunt Arabella will be jealous. Of course you don't mean to return till late?"

Katharine answered that she must be home at a little past six. Mr. Hilliard was to call

for her at half-past five at latest, and she was afraid it was that already. "I am sure I hope papa won't forget all about me," she added. "Poor mamma will never forgive my being absent from dinner to-day."

"Oh, if Uncle Frank doesn't come, and you really must go, Steven will walk with you," said Dot. "Won't you, Steven, when tea is over?"


"No, indeed," cried Katharine, before he could answer, "I would not think of taking Mr. Law—of taking Steven out. If papa does not come I shall just wait patiently till they send for me. You need not be in such a hurry to get rid of me, Dot."

She laughed a little as she said this; and Steven looked steadily at her once more. The laugh, that had once been so pleasant to listen to in its rippling, girlish frankness, seemed to have lost more of its youth than even her face had lost. What was amiss with her? Was her engagement going wrong? Had she failed in subjugating a sufficient number of slaves of late? or—but he hated himself for the thought—was she acting a part with him still?

"If his spirit has suffered it has not affected him much outwardly!" thought Katharine, taking a glance at Steven's bronzed,

be confessed, not felt quite sure as to the degree of intimacy that ought to exist between the inmates of Ashcot and of the Dene. Classes were classes; and whatever one's personal feelings might be, there *were* distinctions it was a duty to keep up. But this small leaven of traditional dignity (due in the first instance to his wife's suggestions, rather than to impulse of his own) had vanished before the daily-increasing liking which the honest-hearted little Squire was beginning to feel for Steven. The lad, whatever his birth, had the feelings of a gentleman; was making Dot a good husband, looking after his farm as he ought, draining his clay-lands on his, the Squire's, own system; and now, here was Katharine capital friends with them both! What should Mr. Hilliard know of the vain repentance, the vain passion, the bitter discontent underlying the outward varnish of this pleasant little picture of domestic peaceful happiness?

"We shall see more of you now Mrs. Dora, I hope," he said, patting Mrs. Lawrence's small shoulder as they were leaving, "Mind, you must consider the Dene just as much your home as ever; and you too, Lawrence. Come to us as you used in the days when you and Dot had not begun to quarrel."



Katharine turned away her head. Dora, not in the slightest degree discountenanced, began to laugh. "We never quarrel now, do we, Steven? and we shall always, always be glad to come to the Dene, Uncle Frank. I haven't seen Aunt Arabella for an age."

"Well, then, come and see her to-morrow; and by the bye, Lawrence," added the Squire, turning to Steven, "if you have nothing particular to do, I wish you would run over in the morning and try this new Irish horse of mine. Kate is bent on riding him to the meet next Wednesday, and I should be glad to see you put him at a fence or two first. You can come over any time of the day you like, Dora my dear, and stop to dinner, both of you."

Dot accepted without giving Steven time to speak; and almost before Mr. Hilliard and Katharine had left the house, was busying herself in thinking over her apparel for the next day. The audience would be a limited one; still, dining at the Dene was "going out" now; and Dora had long ago decided that if she waited for suitable occasions on which to wear her different Parisian clothes she would lie (in the last unalterable toilette) in Clithero churchyard before most of them were worn at all.

“And does not Kate look ill, Steven?” she cried, running out to her husband as he stood, lighting his pipe, in the porch. “I never thought she would lose her looks so soon. Her wedding-day is fixed at last, you know, and Katharine says she is determined to be married in a bonnet, and have no party at all. Did you ever hear of such a thing?”

Steven was silent; his wife’s remarks seldom seemed to him to require any specific answer; besides, he really was occupied at this moment in getting his meerschaum to light; a much graver interest, to a man of sense, than hearing about young ladies’ love-affairs or wedding-dresses.

“It seems quite good to have Kate back,” went on Dot. “There will be some one to speak to, some one to take pity on us a little of an evening now. Oh dear, out again?” This as Steven went inside the passage, and took up his hat. “Now what *can* there be for you to do at this time of night!”

“There are the horses to look to, and the cows to fodder,” Steven answered. “Both the lads have got a holiday to-night.”

“As usual,” said his wife; “I believe you give them holidays so often simply that you may have more work to do yourself! How long will you be, then?” Mrs. Lawrence

felt that it would be better to chatter, even to a silent husband, than be left alone with her own reflections, her own restless dissatisfied heart to-night.

"I shall be back in half an hour, my love," said Steven, stopping and pressing his lips on her forehead with the cold gentleness which already had become a habit (in love nothing is habitual) to him. "Just as long as it will take me to finish my pipe."

Dora looked after her husband as far as she could discern his figure through the darkness, and remarked that when he had gone about a dozen yards from the house he turned away towards the sea-walk, not the stables. From the parlour-window, long afterwards, she could see the red glow of Steven's pipe moving to and fro, to and fro—"like the unquiet ghost that he is!" thought Dot—along the same twenty or thirty paces of the path. And an expression the reverse of tender rose into Mrs. Lawrence's eyes as she stood and watched there.

"Dot and her husband seem to get on together admirably," said Mr. Hilliard, as he was trotting home in excellent spirits, and with an excellent appetite for his dinner, at Katharine's side. "Admirably. You may take some credit to yourself for your success in match-making, after all, Kate!"

CHAPTER XV.

WITHIN AND WITHOUT.

“**L**OVE, they say, cannot exist without jealousy. Can jealousy exist, I wonder, without love?” This Dora Lawrence asked herself one drizzling December evening as she stood by the parlour window of Ashcot playing dreary tunes, her usual occupation, on the glass, and looking out across the wet leafless garden for Steven’s return from hunting.

Can jealousy exist without love? Dora’s was not a mind given in a general way to the solution of nice psychological difficulties, but this question was one which during the past fortnight—the fortnight that had elapsed since Katharine’s return—she had put to herself pretty frequently. “The fact is, I suppose, there are different sorts of jealousy,” she went on in her thoughts, after crossing to stir the fire and look at herself in the unflattering dull old glass over the mantel-

shelf; then returning more drearily than before to her watch beside the window; "and what I feel is a remote variety, not following the ordinary laws of the species. A woman who was jealous in the good orthodox fashion would be jealous under any circumstances. I should not. If I had amusements, if I had friends, I should be grateful to any one who would keep Steven away five or six hours a day, and then send him back in a better temper in the evening! I'm jealous—if it is jealousy—just because I hate other people to be amused and me not, La—la! am I bad?—am I wicked at heart? Is it much to want my little bit of distraction, my little bit of pleasure, when all the rest of the world are amusing themselves without me?" And as Dot leaned her head against the window, heavy tears—for she was not en toilette, had no complexion this afternoon—began to roll slowly down her miserable face.

Five o'clock came, but no Steven; and about ten minutes after the usual time old Barbara, unbidden, brought in candles and tea. Dot was seated by the fire now; her little figure curled up in the solitary arm-chair the room possessed—a huge structure, affording no available rest either for the back or head—with her face buried down in her

hands. She started up, white as a ghost, and with her dark eyes looking darker and bigger than usual, at the old servant's entrance. "There's no good bringing tea yet. Your master is out. You know very well I wouldn't begin without him."

Barbara set down the candles and the tea-tray, stood for a minute erect and silent, then cleared her throat twice, thrice, and came over the room to Dora's side. "My dear," she said, "don't 'ee fret! Steven didn't ought to leave you as he does, and I mean to tell him so. I've baked you some hot cakes such as you like, and done you a bit of ham on the grill, and do'ee set up and make a good tea. There was never a man yet brought home quicker by his wife's keeping an empty stomach and worriting after him."

If the kitchen clock had suddenly broken out into words of human sympathy Dot could scarcely have been more taken aback than by the sound of Barbara's voice speaking to *her* in kindness. What should she know of that old heart's passionate love and passionate jealousy? How guess that in pitying her, Steven's neglected wife, Barbara was but joining issue against the woman whom she looked upon as the common enemy of both—Katharine Fane?

"I am sure I don't feel as if I could eat," she cried, with a gulp; but at that moment the odours of hot cakes and broiled ham came in from the kitchen, and she got down out of her chair. "This damp weather makes me hoarser than ever, and—and my head aches. I don't think I shall ever know what it is to feel well again!"

She did in truth look desperately ill at this moment, as many women, whose beauty depends upon art do when art chances to be laid aside. Barbara looked at her long and steadily. "Mrs. Steven," said she, "when I first heard of Steven's marrying—yes, and when I first seen you here, and no more suited to farm ways than I should be to sit up on a sofy alongside the Squire's lady—my heart was set——"

"—Set against me!" cried Dora, as she hesitated. "I am sure you needn't mind speaking the truth. I am getting to see pretty well how much everybody at Ashcot cares for me!"

"Well, I knew that my poor boy had done a foolish thing by marrying out of his class and out of his religion—there's the truth—and I showed it——"

"—You did!" cried Dora.

"And now—now, Mrs. Steven," went on

Barbara, with a quiver of the lip, "I say wherever the fault was before marriage the fault of your unhappiness as a wife will lie at Steven's door! What business has he riding here and there, to hounds one day, coursing the next—at the side of those who should blush to see him there—and you, not married two months, alone fretting by yourself? In our class of life we've no soft words for those who come between man and wife; but the gentry's ways—the gentry's ways," said Barbara, with rising passion, "are different to ours in most things, as the Lawrences have found to their cost before this!"

Mrs. Lawrence bit her lip, and looked steadily down at the faded pattern of the carpet. The surface comedy, not the hidden pathos, of every situation of human life, was always what really impressed Dot vividly; and she had all the trouble in the world not to laugh at this moment. She, Dora Fane, listening to virtuous homilies from old Barbara! Dora Fane pitied as a wife whose heart was breaking over a faithless husband's neglect! Mechanically Mrs. Lawrence passed her fingers down over her pocket to make sure that two letters which had reached her by the morning's post were lying safe there.

"I couldn't hear a word against Steven,

and I don't know who the 'other person' is you speak of. He rode to the meet with the Squire and Miss Fane to-day. Of course if I was strong I would like to ride too, but I'm not strong, and—and I could never wish Steven to be in better company than my Uncle Frank and my dear Cousin Katharine."

She said this with as pretty an air of self-sacrifice as can be imagined, and Barbara's stern heart softened more and more. "You'll never be strong," she said, "as long as you mope in doors by yourself, and don't breathe the air from one week's end to another; and so I'll tell Steven to-night. Why don't he set up a pony-shay, and drive you about a bit, as his Uncle Joshua used *his* wife?" cried Barbara, forgetting, probably, the unending source of strife which that very "pony-shay" had been between herself and Mrs. Joshua.

"Oh, I'm sure I don't want any fresh expense incurred for me," said Dot, modestly. "Perhaps if we had a pony carriage it would bore Steven to have to drive me in it. What would do me good I think, and not cost much," she gave a quick look at Barbara's face, "would be a little change—that is, I mean if Steven thought it right to leave the farm."

"It would be hard to say what Steven does think right now," said Barbara, with a solemn shake of the head, as she walked off out of the parlour. "But he shall hear my mind—he shall hear my mind!" This Dora overheard as the old woman's firm heavy step went down the passage. "Those whom God hath put together . . ." here the welcome sound of crackling fat told Dora the ham was coming off the fire, and the rest of the quotation was lost—"and not all the gentry in England shall hinder me from telling Steven what I think of him, ay—and of her too."


A minute later the hot scones and ham, with extra good tea and extra thick cream, were set upon the table; and poor Mrs. Lawrence, considering the state of her delicate throat and of her wounded affections, managed to make a really admirable high-tea. "I tried so hard to eat," she said, when Barbara took away the empty plates. "Mr. Lawrence may not be home for hours, and I don't want him to find me more faint and wearied than I can help when he does come."

While these things went on in his household, Steven was riding slowly home through the lanes at Miss Fane's side. I have said

that it was a raw December evening. The sky was overcast; the air charged with moisture; the roads were ankle-deep in mud; the bare trees dripping and forlorn. But a raw December evening, like most other things or seasons, takes its colouring mainly from the prism through which human eyes view it. To Dot alone at the farm-house window, with her own thoughts (and a new-gotten letter worse than her thoughts) for companionship, no sky had ever been so black, no world so unutterably, hopelessly full of gloom as the sky and world she looked at to-day. To Steven, after a first-rate run, with the glow of animal health and spirits in his veins, with Katharine's face beside him in the twilight, the world for this short half-hour was well-nigh as bright a world again as it had been under the sunshine of June. What had he to do with Miss Fane now? What hope could stir in his heart at being near Lord Petres' future wife—his own waiting for him with poor childish babble, with unsympathetic voice, at the fireside at home? What did Miss Fane feel for him, but pitying toleration as her cousin's husband? What but madness could make him haunt her as he did, mindless of all past misery she had wrought him; rewarded for twenty-four

hours by the touch of her friendly hand, the "good morning" of her friendly voice? Well, Steven Lawrence *was* mad: loved Katharine Fane still, you see; there is the answer.

He had to ride back with her to the Dene this evening, for the Squire's horse had fallen lame early in the run, and out of the dozen men who volunteered to see her home Miss Fane, naturally, had chosen her Cousin Steven, so she called him, for an escort. Scarcely twenty sentences: none for very certain that would bear recording: passed between them as they rode along. No man living was more profoundly ignorant than Steven of the art of conversation. Unless he spoke the truth—which, while he lived, he must never speak to Katharine Fane—he held his peace. But there is the silence that comes from having nothing to say; the silence that comes from having too much; and perhaps this last is as eloquent as any speech we know of. To Katharine, at all events, those rutty lanes, that long expanse of common leading from Stourmouth to Chithero, had never seemed so short as to-night. She had got back much of her bodily strength during the last fortnight, which showed that her own system of tonics was a good one; that



Brighton life, and want of exercise, and thinking of herself and her own troubles, had been mostly to blame for her white cheeks. And as for spirits—well, throughout all this portion of her life, Katharine Fane never gave herself time to think whether her spirits were good or bad. She got up the second that her eyes were open in the morning; went with a sort of feverish zeal through her usual duties at the school-house and in the parish; walked, rode, dutifully visited poor little Dot at Ashcot; saw Steven Lawrence on the kind of terms she would have done had he been her brother; and when night came was sure of sleep through sheer bodily fatigue. “Are you trying to kill yourself, Kate?” her mother asked her more than once when, in spite of rain and wind and early snow, Katharine would appear of a morning in her habit and hat as usual. And, “not myself, mamma,” was Katharine’s answer. “I am not trying to kill myself, but a moping laziness which took possession of me awhile since, and which I am determined shall die. Leave me alone, mamma dear. When my enemy is dead and buried I’ll stop quietly at home, and do worsted work, and sing songs, and be like other people again.”

Well, to-night the enemy was slain, or so she began to think. The horrible distaste for life which used to overcome her in Brighton was gone: so much at least was clear. She was living on terms of good-will with Steven, meeting him daily; wishing, God knows, to see him happy in his home, and to be his friend and Dora's! And the wintry smell from the purple-brown fields had never seemed so fresh to her, or the way home, through the rutty lanes or across Stourmouth Common, so short. Yes—the enemy was slain! A pure new affection, such as she might have felt if heaven had given her a brother, had replaced the feeling which died—which should have died—on Steven's wedding-day; and Steven . . . oh, Steven was happy enough; no doubt of that! Were men like women in their capacity for remembering? Her imagination had led her astray just at first about his life being “paralysed.” His farm and his horses and his gun filled Steven's heart, and it was well so. The enemy was slain; the requiem chaunted; and both had come back to the prosaic well-beaten road of life along which men and women do walk contentedly when the first summer days are past; the first

roses, with their blossoms and their thorns, plucked and dead.

They rode silently up the avenue to the Dene, and into the stable-yard. The head-groom was away : only one of the stable lads and Katharine's great setter pup came out in the darkness to meet them : and for the first time it fell to Steven to help Miss Fane to dismount.

" Oh, thanks ; I can jump down very well by myself," cried Katharine, as he came up to her side. " I am quite accustomed to mount and dismount alone." Saying this, she disengaged her foot from the stirrup, gathered her habit together in her hand, then, either from the horse swerving, or from the puppy springing up to greet her, or both, missed her balance and, but for Steven, would have fallen heavily to the ground.

He caught her ; he held her up in his arms—one second ; not longer than a groom would have held his mistress if he had saved her from falling. But in that second Katharine Fane knew that the enemy who was slain, over whose grave the requiem was chaunted, had come back to life.

With a hurried " Good-night !" a hurried shake of the hand, she ran past him into the

house; and Steven, after lingering to see a light shine from an upper window that he knew, rode away home to Ashcot, and to his wife.

Old Barbara met him at the kitchen door. He was splashed from head to foot; his handsome face glowed with health, and something more than health; and he was whistling. "Yes," thought Barbara, "a man leading such a life as his *whistling!*" The old woman's face was solemn as a churchyard slab. She raised up a candle, and surveyed him up and down with cold scrutiny. "You are here at last, then," she said.

"Yes," said Steven, with perfect good humour. "I am here—not killed this time, you see, Barbara."

Barbara coughed drily. "I'm never afeard but you'll take care of yourself, Steven—of yourself and of your own pleasures! If you looked a little after others, too, you'd do well, I'm thinking. Here's Mrs. Steven been fretting herself till she's sick, and no wonder. Your wife *is* sick, Steven—there's the long and short of it—and it's ill of you to be riding and gallanting after other folks, and her sick at home, and so I tell you."

"Riding, gallanting after other folks?" cried Steven, the blood rushing hotly to his

face. "What, in God's name, are you talking about? I didn't expect such nonsense from you, Barbara! Must a man leave off in the midst of a long run because he happens to have left a wife at home, or what?"

"A man should remember, whether he's on horseback or afoot, that he *has* a wife at home," said Barbara, undaunted. "You chose her, and you did wed her, Steven; and I say it's no man's part to neglect her now."

Just at this juncture the parlour door opened, and "Steven, Steven! have you come at last?" sounded faintly, in Dot's voice, attuned to that plaintive minor, the like of which the hearts of most married men have had occasion to respond to in their lives.

With his conscience pricking him horribly, Steven went forward to meet her. "I'm really not fit to come near you, my love," he cried; "I'm mud all over; the country was never in such a state; and—and I hope, Dora, you have not waited tea for me. I'll just run and change my clothes, and——"

"Oh dear, not for my sake!" cried Dora, going back to the fire. "It's *my* bedtime. I shan't be up ten minutes longer. After sitting alone all day long, I'm sure one has

not heart to care whether people's clothes are covered with mud or not."

She sat down, very upright indeed, in the tower of an armchair, and stared disconsolately at the fire. Steven pushed to the door, shutting out the distant thunders of Barbara's voice, and came across the room to his wife's side. "Dora," he said, after looking down at her white face for a minute or two, "I'm sorry I left you alone so long. It won't happen again. It was the best run we have had this season, and the Squire's horse unfortunately fell lame, and I had to take your cousin back to the Dene. If it hadn't been for that, I should have been here an hour ago or more."

Dot smiled: the most unpleasant smile, Steven thought, that he had ever seen on her face. "What a bore for you! How you must have anathematised Uncle Frank and his horse in your hearts, both of you. Steven," perfectly abruptly this, "I wonder how you would like it—I wonder what you would say—if I went on as you do?"

Steven did not answer. The suddenness of the attack left him, as his wife intended it should do, no time to collect his thoughts.

"I know very well that the world makes one rule for men and another for women," went

on Dot; "but you don't belong, or pretend not to belong, to the world; and I ask you, on your conscience, what you would think if any man was to run after me—spend the same number of hours with me daily as you do with Katharine? Dear Kate is perfectly blameless," cried Mrs. Lawrence, quickly; warned, perhaps, by some rising expression round the corners of Steven's lips. "She likes riding and hunting, and naturally finds you a pleasanter companion than Uncle Frank. Kate is my best friend, and I hate myself for feeling a little jea—jealous!"—Dot hid away her face; "but I can't help it—and I know you never loved me! and I've been alone," holding out her hand to him, "eight hours and twenty minutes. Oh, Steven—Steven!"

The big manly heart of Steven Lawrence was overcome in an instant. He never thought of defending himself: he felt, with shame and contrition, that he was guilty: and Dora's skilful generosity in withdrawing blame from Katharine had disarmed him on the one point where he might have found strength.

"I've been selfish to leave you, Dora. My poor, foolish little Dora! to think that you should have fretted for me, though! As

if—why, my dear, what *can* you have to be jealous of now?”

He knelt down at her side, and Dora put her arms round his neck and kissed him. Barbara, marching sternly in just then with supper for the master, found them so; and was reminded—long afterwards that likeness haunted her!—of a certain picture of Samson and Delilah in the family bible.

As an ally stronger than all others against Katharine Fane, she had joined issue with Steven's wife an hour before; yet had she never liked—never trusted her so little as at this moment. Poor Barbara's ignorant love, you must remember, was that of a mother for her first-born; and such love is apt to be prophetic in its intuitions.

CHAPTER XVI.

DORA CONQUERS.

“**F**OR the economy of the plan I undertake to answer,” said Dora. “Five hundred francs, twenty pounds a month for an apartment in the Champs Elysées is ludicrously—simply ludicrously—cheap! and living, if one knows what one is about, can be reduced to a mere nothing in Paris.”

Dora’s husband opened his eyes wide.

“Oh! I know what you mean, Steven,” cried Mrs. Lawrence; “we *flung* money away when we were there. I suppose people always do when they are first married. That extravagant English hotel! those preposterous wines! table-d’hôte dinners every day! best places at the theatre! Now, if we were living quietly in an apartment, just see the difference! We have our coffee in the morning, a little dish (I could dress it myself), with a glass of common wine at noon, a frugal dinner at six, and then, as people of

our means ought, go to a cheap place at the theatre—if, indeed, we felt ourselves justified in going to theatres at all. I could keep our living there to a less sum, actually less, than it costs us here at Ashcot ; and it seems to me that anything in the world is better than spending one's money on doctors' bills. But, of course, you will do as you like," added Dot, with resignation. "I tell you of the offer I have got, and now it rests with you, dearest, to accept or reject it."

Steven's supper was over ; and Dora, with a great increase of animation in her face, was kneeling dutifully beside him while he smoked his last pipe beside the fire. "You know who Grizelda Long is ?" she went on, as Steven remained ominously silent on the subject of Parisian happiness and Parisian economy. "The poor girl was one of our bridesmaids,—don't you remember ?"

"I remember," said Steven, "no girls except your cousin and the Miss Ducies. There was an ill-favoured elderly woman—"

"That was Grizelda—that was Grizelda !" cried Dora, clapping her hands with friendly exultation. "Poor dear thing, she certainly is not pretty, and I don't pretend to care for her, Steven, but she's the most obliging creature living. Now just let me read you a

bit of her letter. You'll feel differently—I know you will—when you hear what she says about the apartment.”

Mrs. Lawrence put her hand into her pocket, drew forth an envelope bearing a French stamp and post-mark, then leaning forward so that her husband might look over her shoulder if he chose, took out the sheet of foreign paper it contained, and began to read aloud :

“My own—my ever dear Dora.” So the letter began ; and Steven, little as the deciphering of handwriting was his forte, could not but see the words.

“I—I—good gracious, I must have put my letters into the wrong envelopes ! This is not Grizelda’s.” Dot’s face fired crimson, and she crushed the letter hastily back into her pocket. “Ah ! here it is, to be sure ! How dreadfully stupid I’m getting in my old age, Steven !”

“And who is ‘My own—my ever dear Dora’ from, then ?” said Steven, looking steadily at his wife. “You’ve been talking about jealousy, Dora. Suppose I was to become suddenly jealous, and say I insisted on reading that letter through ?”

The tone of his voice was jesting, but there was a look about his face that Dot did

not like ; just a shadow of the look that she had first seen that day when he spoke of Dawes's dishonesty, and of his own Lynch notions respecting the administration of justice.

"You may read anything—everything I possess, Steven, I am sure!" And as she said this Dot moved away nearer to the fire, and the small hand furthest from her husband closed tightly over the letter in her pocket. " ' My own—my ever dear Dora ' is from our dear old governess, Miss Hayes, who, as it chances, is also in Paris just now."

"She writes like a man, both in handwriting and style," said Steven, laconically. "I didn't know women were ever so affectionate in their way of addressing each other."

"Oh dear, yes ! Listen to Grizelda !" cried Dora, unfolding the second letter with self-possession thoroughly restored, "Grizelda, who has not spoken to me a dozen times in her life, and who, I know, *can't* really like me !"

" ' My dearest Dora,—It affords me the greatest pleasure possible to be of a little use to you and your husband.' I must confess I wrote to her, Steven. I thought as the Phantom was in Paris, there could be no

harm in setting her to find out about prices, whether we went or not.—‘Such apartments as you require are very hard—almost impossible—to get, but, by a most singular chance, I believe, I could at this moment put you into exactly what you want. My great friends, the Honourable Mr. and Mrs. Dynevor—’ Poor old Grizelda and her honourables!—‘are obliged by dear Lord Eastmeath’s death to go to Dublin, and are willing to let their apartments for the remainder of the term, two months, at a nominal rent. I have prevailed on them to let the matter stand over till I get your answer; and in great haste, and with affectionate love to Miss Fane when you see her, and remembrances to Mr. Lawrence,

“I am, dearest Dora,

“Your attached friend,

“GRIZELDA LONG.

“ ‘P.S.—The Dynevors ask the ridiculous price of five hundred francs a month! Entresol, sunny side of the Champs Elysées, every thing very small, but large enough for two people, and a *French* servant. Of course, you bring your own plate and linen.—G. L.’

“And now, Steven, cried Dora, “I put

it to you, honestly, Is the offer tempting or is it not?"

"It is not at all tempting to me," said Steven, laying down his pipe and looking straight before him into the fire. "We spent six times as much as we ought when we were in Paris the last time, and, as far as I could see, got very poor enjoyment for our money."

Dot made him a little mock reverence, and smiled. "A hundred thanks for the compliment! You are speaking of our honeymoon, my dear."

"I am speaking of Paris," said Steven, "and I believe if we had gone to any other place on earth, I should have liked it better. If you really want change, you shall have it," he went on. "I'll take you for a week to Ramsgate, anywhere you like, but don't speak of Paris. Paris isn't suited to our means, or to me. Twenty pounds a month may seem ridiculously cheap to your friend, Miss Long. I call it ridiculously dear. At all events, it is a vast deal more than I can afford, or than I mean to pay."

"Then the thing is settled," said Dora, with the corners of her mouth twitching. "As to Ramsgate, I thank you! I would rather take to my room and remain there all

the winter than go to Ramsgate. The thing is settled. I am ill: I believe my left lung is seriously affected. I get thinner, and my cough gets worse every day, and I thought Paris would set me up; and we have an offer, whatever you may say, of extraordinary reasonable lodgings there. Still, if you can't afford it, I say no more. I am not consulted in the housekeeping expenses, therefore you must excuse me for my ignorance of your means. Two hunters in the stable certainly don't *give* one the idea of extreme poverty!"

"I'm obliged to keep horses for the farm," said Steven. "Besides, I ride to sell, as you know. The chesnut is as good as sold to Lord Haverstock at this moment."

"And when the chesnut is gone?"

"I am thinking of buying that grey filly of Mills, if I find she's up to my weight. He is only asking forty sovereigns for her and—"

"Forty sovereigns!" interrupted Dora; "the exact sum required for two months' hire of my poor little apartment!"

"And before the season was a quarter over I'd engage to sell her again for eighty," said Steven. "You don't understand, Dora. Horse-dealing, in a small way, is part of my

business, and for my horses to be seen I must ride them. 'Tis a business," he went on, "that my father and grandfather, and every one belonging to my name, have tried their hand at, and none of us ever made a bad thing of it yet."

"Business!" said Dot, with a flash of her great eyes. "Wonderfully pleasant business, I must say! To go, for *my* health, to Paris, would be very insipid compared to the 'business' of hunting, as well-mounted as any man in Kent, at Katharine Fane's side!"

"Katharine Fane!" cried Steven—I regret to add with an angry expletive closely following—"can't you leave her name alone? What has she got to do with this senseless scheme about going to Paris?"

"Everything," said Dot, calmly; all her good temper returning at the sight of Steven's anger. "Or, rather, she has everything to do with the senseless scheme not being carried out. I'm not playing at jealousy, Steven, and you are not playing at admiration of my cousin! When you first offered to marry me, you told me you had loved her as well as a man could love a woman so far above him in rank, that there were things impossible to get over in a day, *et cetera*, but that you would try honestly to give me the first

place in your heart ; and so I accepted you."

Steven put his hand up wearily across his forehead.

"So I accepted you," went on Dot, "thinking, out of self-respect alone, that you would treat me with consideration when I was your wife—I, who, at least, had never despised, never misled you !"

Here another exclamation, not worthy, alas ! to be recorded, broke from Steven's lips.

"Ah, it's very well to be violent—very well to use language like that," said Dora. "I say I am right, and that I have justice on my side. Why, your own servant, little as she likes me, pities me and condemns your goings on, and the way you leave me here alone. However, I'll say no more to you, Steven. I'll tell Kate, who has been good to me always, what I suffer, and ask her to have pity on me."

Steven grasped hold of her wrist with sudden passion. "Do you know what you are talking about ?" he explained. "Do you know what you mean when you threaten to expose this absurd discussion to your cousin ?"

Dora came a little nearer to her husband again, and looked down, nothing daunted,

into his eyes. "My dear," she said, "don't hurt me—my poor little wrists haven't much muscle in them! and just give me a plain, straightforward answer, please, to what I'm going to ask you. *Have* you got over your old dream about Katharine? *Is* it natural that I should like you to be with her, and away from me, every day, and all day long of your life?"

"I—we spoke of this when I came in," said Steven, "and I promised that I would remain at home with you more. You forgave me freely, remember, Dora. I looked upon the story as finished."

"Ah, if it could only be so!" said Dot, with a sigh. "But I'm afraid—I'm afraid there are some stories that are never quite finished while we live!" She drew her hand from his, then stole it round his neck again. "I'm no good—I've no place in the world," she sobbed. "Why do I fret at being ill? Why do I want Paris, or any other place, to set me up? I'll stop here alone, dear Steven—here at Ashcot—and never ask for a change, and never, if I can help it, be selfish or jealous about your amusements again!"

She cried—great tears, like a child's, running down her cheeks—for two or three minutes. At last, "How soon is this apart-

ment to be vacant?" asked Steven. His voice was changed: he felt really touched, really conscience-stricken, by her sudden outburst of resignation. "I've been thinking, Dora, that, some way or another, I'll manage for you to have it. Perhaps we might contrive so that I needn't be with you the whole time?"

"Oh, dear, yes!" cried Dot, readily. "That is, you know, if you were really wanted on the farm."

"And we must do what we can to make up afterwards for the expense. If you think Paris will do you good, my dear, you shall go there, I promise you."

"Dearest Steven! There'll be no expense as regards dress, for, of course, I have got all my wedding things not worn. What will the Ducies say? I'll go and tell Katharine to-morrow before church-time, and then write to Grizelda at once. Oh, I do feel in such spirits!"—the tears were on her cheeks still. "We'll go by Havre—what does sea-sickness matter? Havre is the cheapest route, and I mean to save every shilling that I can. We needn't have a regular servant; a charwoman at fifteen sous a day would be quite enough, with my knowledge of cooking. So lucky Grizelda Long


is to be in Paris for the winter, isn't it?"

"Very lucky," said Steven, absently;
"and your other friend, Miss Hayes, too."

"Well, as to Miss Hayes," said Dot, a good deal of colour coming into her face again at the mention of her old friend's name, "I don't really care much about her; indeed, she will most likely have left before we get there. Our friendship is a thing of the past. I shan't want society, you know, Steven. To walk about in the bright air will be enough for me, and to visit the galleries and places of interest with you, dear!"

Steven thought silently of the galleries and places of interest they had wearied through during their honeymoon; and in a few minutes' time Dot (singing and jumping, in spite of her thirty years, like a child who has been promised a holiday) ran upstairs, and he was left alone.

The first great contest, the first real struggle for power was over, he felt, between himself and his wife;—and his wife had conquered. It was well that she had done so! Rigidly taking himself to task as he sits here, still in his splashed hunting-clothes, staring, with moody face, into the fire, Steven feels that he *has* been disloyal to Dora, to the only heart that beats for him, that belongs to him



in the world. All the free-lance morality, the tawdry Don Juan doctrines of the school of Mr. Clarendon Whyte are unknown to poor ill-educated Steven. He is no better—feels himself to be no better—than other men; is passionate; easily beset by temptation; weakly prone to fall. But he is narrow-minded enough to hold sternest, unflinching opinions concerning honesty and justice; and the knowledge that he loves Katharine Fane—follows her, dreams of her, thrills at the touch of her hand—comes over him at this moment, accompanied by a sense of something very like dishonour. He looks back to his treatment of Dora from the hour of their marriage to this; knows that he has never loved her; knows with what automatic kindness he has sought to hide his want of love; knows how the happiest hour in the twenty-four has always been that in which, with blessed sense of liberty, he has broken from her side, and found himself free to seek Katharine Fane. Why, to-day, this poor little wife of his fretting for him by the fire-side, what guilty hopes—no, not hopes, he has none—what guilty intoxication filled him as he rode along, silently watching her face in the twilight! what madness made him forget everything in the happiness of holding

her for a moment in his arms, half-an-hour before Dora's kiss of welcome was to meet his cheek at home! Was this state of divided allegiance, this hankering after the woman who had deliberately rejected him, a life worthy of a man to lead? Nay, more, was it not dishonouring to Katharine as to Dora, that the latter, in her inmost heart, should have cause, however slight, either of jealousy or distrust?

He had loved Miss Fane from the first, you must remember, with a love that the majority of men would disbelieve in, or perhaps possess no line to fathom: even under the first intolerable smart of his disappointment, in the society of Lord Haverstock, and of Lord Haverstock's friends, had formed no theory of women unworthy for one white sister, Katharine, to take her place in it. He might degrade his love; he might degrade himself; his ideal of womanhood—so he thought—could never be lowered while Katharine lived; and in his blind worship of her all other women, Dora among the rest, had become exalted. He knew his wife to be vain and artificial; a creature unaccountably made up of small caprices, gold dust, millinery: without an employment, without an interest in life that he could understand; but

still a woman—with all her smaller demerits, more than worthy of *his* reverence. What worse sins could be laid to Dora's account than undue love for balls and theatres, or perhaps a half-foolish, half-tender feeling for Mr. Clarendon Whyte in days gone by? Happy for him if his own conscience could show as unblotted a score!

Well, she had conquered now, poor child, and it was best for him that she had done so. In obeying her wishes he would be taken bodily away out of the reach of temptation; would be forced—not into forgetting, that was impossible—but out of the groove, at least, of loving Katharine Fane! Would have learnt to live without her before her marriage should divide them more irrevocably still, and for ever. . . .

He thought all this honestly; and yet, if the inmost desire of his heart could have availed him, Steven's life had been arrested at this very turning-point of its course. Which of us, midway in some doubtful enterprise, has not felt the same? has not shrunk, cowardly, from the thought of any progress beyond the present scanty good? He had lost Katharine, but he saw her daily; was nothing to her but a sort of upper groom, of tolerated humble relation, yet was *that*. The

past, with its honied poison, its alternation of fierce joys and miseries, was over; that moment in the boat when she had let him hold her hands; that moment on his marriage-day when they had bidden silent farewells, and he had guessed the meaning written on her white face—all over. The future belonged to Dora, and to Lord Petres. If the present; this very bubble on the foam, this very break of the wave upon the shore; would but stay!

And already the wave has broken, the bubble burst. And Dora, upstairs, is tearing Mr. Clarendon Whyte's letter into smallest atoms, while she vacillates in her mind between lilac serge and bronze-brown silk as a suitable costume wherein to travel to Paris.

CHAPTER XVII.

LANSQUENET AND BACCARAT.

EARLY next morning Mrs. Lawrence, her health already improved, walked over to the Dene, and, not a little to her surprise, found Katharine a powerful auxiliary as to the Paris scheme. Mrs. Hilliard, whose temper was usually fitful on Sunday—it was her custom to replace sensational by theological fiction on that day—went dead against the proposition from the first. Other people in delicate health were obliged to stay winter and summer wherever their husbands chose to live. A wife with her heart in its proper place should look above, not around and outside her own home, for solace and support.

“I do look above, Aunt Arabella,” said Dot, “and I see damp, in great patches, all over the ceiling. It’s the damp that makes me so ill. As to my heart being in its right place, I very much doubt it—’tis for that I want to have a Paris opinion. Uncle Frank,

what do you say ? If we have money enough to go, and as Steven is willing to do anything for my health, do you think there's any great sin in my wanting to have eight weeks more of amusement before I settle down in Ashcot for life ?”

“ I think Paris the worst place possible for you to go to,” answered the Squire ; early Mabille recollections, and general visions of extravagance and money-borrowing rising before his mind. “ It may be very well for you ; but what's your husband, who doesn't know six words of French, to do with himself ? Why I—I who speak the language,” said the Squire, with pardonable vanity, “ always find a week of Paris enough for me. Lawrence is a man taken up with his outdoor pursuits. He'll be as miserable as a bandycoot, cooped up in a Paris entresol—and during the best part of the hunting season too !”

“ I don't know anything about bandycoots,” said Mrs. Lawrence, “ but I know *I* am perfectly miserable cooped up alone at Ashcot now ! Why are husbands and husbands' amusements always to be studied so much, I want to know ? It's very pleasant, no doubt, Uncle Frank, for Steven to shoot, or course, or hunt, every day of the week,

with you and Katharine, but why am I not to be considered? I'm a human being, I suppose, although I do labour under the immense disadvantage of being a wife."

And then it was that Katharine, to Dot's astonishment, struck boldly in to the rescue: Katharine, like Steven, had had her lonely meditations, her remorseful vigil the night before! "I agree with you thoroughly, Dot. I think that people like papa and me can't judge how miserable the country is to you in winter. Now, papa, I ask you, mustn't a southerly wind and a cloudy sky seem very different to poor Dot at home, to what they do to you and me just as we skirt round Barlow's wood, a promising soft rain in our face, and hear the first bay of the hounds in the distance? If—if Steven was against this Paris plan it would be different, but he is not; and I say, Dot ought to go. She is not looking strong, and, just now, at the beginning of winter, a change of air may do wonders for her."

And later in the afternoon, when the cousins were alone together, Katharine did more than express favourable opinions; she offered—Dot faintly protesting against such generosity!—the loan of one hundred pounds, in furtherance of the scheme. "Don't refuse

me, dear Dot," she said. "My money lies at the bank, of no use to me, or anyone else. Everything I want, and don't want, papa buys me, you know. Sometimes," added Katharine, half sadly, "I think my fate is to be like that of Miss Kilmansegg. Gold, gold, nothing but gold, and never an ounce of happiness to be bought with it!" and she sighed.

"Well," said Dot, "whoever Miss Kilmansegg may have been, if she had plenty of money, I envy her. My dear Kate, money does everything. If I could keep a carriage, and see my friends about me, and rebuild Ashcot, and have proper servants, and go up to town when I liked, I should be the happiest woman in Kent. Our difference of tastes divides—must divide—Steven and me now; whereas, if we had plenty of money, we should never know whether our tastes were different or not, because each could gratify them."

"And you will accept what I ask you then?"

"Dear Katharine! You put it in such a way that I feel it impossible to refuse."

So the matter was settled. That night a letter was written, bidding Grizelda Long take the apartments, in Steven's name, off

the hands of the Honourable Augustus Dynevor; and a week later, with packages, said old Barbara, enough for six decent families when she was young, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence again started by the afternoon Folkestone train on their road to Paris.

"It is better so, Kate," said the Squire, on the evening of their departure. "I shall miss Lawrence, and so will you, for a bit; but I believe it's as well Dot should have her way just at first. When she has gone through two months with Master Steven in an entresol, you may take my word for it, she will have had enough of Paris! The man was never meant to live in cities, and my opinion is we shall see him back here in Clithero before a fortnight is past."

But the Squire's prophecy did not come true; indeed,—to judge from Dot's letters—it seemed that Steven quickly fell as much under the influence of Parisian enchantment as his wife. At first, "Steven is a little bit puzzled to know what to do with himself," Mrs. Lawrence wrote; "but we are always together, and I try to interest myself in what I think most likely to interest him." Then, later on, after rose-coloured accounts of balls and parties, for Dot was beginning to make her way into "society:" "I can't

say that Steven cares for such things," she would say, "but he goes, and is very patient." Then, later still: "I have engagements for every afternoon and every evening of the week, and dear Steven, I am glad to say, has found friends and occupations that suit him too. We are perfectly contented, both of us; my health is wonderfully better; my heart, tell Aunt Arabella, quite in its right place; and I shall never, never forget that it was chiefly your kindness, Kate, that enabled us to come here."

Steven Lawrence leading a contented town-life with friends, with occupations that suited him! Katharine, guided by I know not what instinctive fear, despatched a letter at once to George Gordon, who was in Paris, bidding him write her word, without delay, as to how Dora and her husband were getting on. "Dot tells me she goes out a great deal, but among what kind of people?" wrote Miss Fane, "and does her husband accompany her? Lord Petres, as you know, is going through his usual Christmas martyrdom at Eccleston, so in his absence I trouble you—will you forgive me?—with my silly questions about the gossip of Paris. Dear Captain Gordon, you are so good always in executing my commissions that I am

sure you won't mind finding out as much as you possibly can for me about the Lawrences and the Lawrences' friends, before you write next."

And accordingly, five or six days later, she got back this intelligence:—quite plainly worded, as you see; George Gordon knew Katharine Fane too well to think of putting anything he had to say to her into pretty or dubious phrases: "Your cousin, Mrs. Lawrence, does go out a great deal, among a set of English people to whom, I should say, Miss Long or, perhaps, Mr. Clarendon Whyte must have introduced her. Her husband seldom shows; never, in the society of his wife. Is he a rich man? I should hope so. His friends, I hear, are people whose time is chiefly taken up in playing lansquenet and baccarat; and lansquenet and baccarat are expensive games, when a man first goes through his apprenticeship to them in Paris. I see Mrs. Lawrence daily in the Champs Elysées, and sometimes at the opera, but have not yet been able to speak to her. You know how much love Clarendon Whyte and I had for each other of old? Well, whenever I have seen Mrs. Lawrence, as yet, Mr. Clarendon Whyte, has happened, unfortunately, to be at her side."

Clarendon Whyte in Paris, the constant companion of Mrs. Lawrence; Steven going through his apprenticeship at lansquenet and baccarat! The news seemed so absurdly, so palpably unlikely, that Katharine, for the first five minutes, laughed over George Gordon's letter; then, calling to mind how Mrs. Dering had ceased, of late, to mention Clarendon Whyte's name; calling to mind, too, a certain half-tone of concealment, in a good deal that Dot had written about her more intimate English friends; she went round to the opposite extreme of credulity, and if she had had the means would have flown off herself to Paris, on the instant. True? what should hinder it, alas! from being true? Had she not had a presentiment of evil when she wrote her letter to George Gordon? What love for Steven had, in reality, ever effaced the old folly from Dora's heart? What stability of character was there to keep Dora straight under the temptations of Paris? Wearied with uncongenial frivolity at home; with "engagements for every afternoon and every evening of the week;" what more likely than that Steven should seek relief in the society of men abroad, unsuspecting of the perils to which over-much liberty might lead a woman so fickle and so

unballasted as his wife? After a day and night of silent anxiety—for neither to her mother nor the Squire had she courage to confess her fears—Katharine made up her mind for action, and started boldly up to town by the earliest morning train, determined to lay bare the state of the case to Mrs. Dering. Slight though the sympathy was between them in matters of sentiment, Katharine had fullest respect still for Mrs. Dering's opinion on all worldly affairs. Dora Lawrence was Arabella's cousin. Dora's good name, the good name of Dora's husband, were subjects in which every member of the family must be supposed to have some degree of vested or vicarious interest. Mrs. Dering had friends of her own in Paris, and could, at least, find out how much truth there was in George Gordon's account; at least could advise what kind of warning or of reproach should be addressed to Dora.

"Bella," she said, within ten minutes of her arrival, "I have come to town to-day to see you and the children, of course—but that is not the real object of my visit. I have something very miserable to tell you, something that concerns us all terribly nearly. Read this," and Katharine drew forth George Gordon's letter, and put it,

without a word of comment, into her sister's hand.

Mrs. Dering read it through carefully; folded, returned it into its envelope, and to Katharine. "And what is the misery about, Kate? and what is it that concerns us all so nearly?"

"Can you ask?" cried Katharine. "Steven Lawrence spending his time at cards—I suppose they play these horrid games with cards—and Dot—I can't bear to speak of it!—Dot going into a doubtful kind of society alone, or rather with Mr. Clarendon Whyte for her companion! What ought we to do! Shall I write? Shall I get papa to go and look after them?"

Mrs. Dering smiled. "Dora would pay so much attention to your letter, or to poor dear papa's good advice! You are honest and single-hearted as ever, Katharine," she added, "and naturally feel disgusted at what you have heard. I take it all as the painful but inevitable consequence of Dora's getting her freedom. She has no principles, my dear, as I have always told you; and without principles—without principles, a woman as vain and as fond of pleasure as poor Dora is tolerably sure to end . . . as she is doing! We must hope for the best," added Mrs.

Dering, calmly; "and really so many people have taken up this fashion of being fast that what once would have put a woman out of society, as likely as not may pass unobserved now. We hear nothing very bad as yet, you must recollect."

"I don't know what you call bad!" said Katharine, hotly. "For a woman as young and pretty as Dot to go about in Paris without her husband, and for the husband to spend his time with his own gambling associates, seems bad enough to me. Bella, tell me candidly, had you heard anything of this before?" cried poor Katharine. "Had you an idea that Dot and Clarendon Whyte were meeting again like this in Paris?"

"I knew that Mr. Whyte was in Paris, and I knew that Dora Lawrence was there, dressing and driving, and living altogether in very bad style. But small gossip, as you know, Kate," said Mrs. Dering, "is not one of my sins. I heard these things, but I did not repeat them, even to you all at home. If one's relations are discreditable, I never see that anything is to be gained by making a noise about their discredibility oneself."

Katharine was silent for a minute or two. "I am quite determined to do something," she cried at last. "Dot may be foolish and

fond of show and attention, but I know she will always mind what I say to her. As to her husband—”

“As to her husband—this baccarat-playing husband?”

“Steven is too upright, too simple of heart to suspect evil in others,” said Katharine, slowly, and lifting her eyes full to Mrs. Dering’s. “He may, or may not, be losing his money at cards; at one time, I remember, when—when he left off coming to the Dene, papa used to tell me he played too high at Lord Haverstock’s; used to say that gambling, in some form or other, runs in the Lawrences’ blood. All this is no business of ours. It is of Dot and of Mr. Whyte that I am thinking, and I say Steven in his ignorant confidence might see no evil in an intimacy that a man of the world——Bella, I can’t talk about it—there’s a disgrace even in the suspicion of disgrace! but I’ll go to them. I’ll make papa take me over to Paris, and I’ll bid Steven bring his wife home to Ashcot at once.”

An indignant light shone in Katharine Fane’s eyes. “You are very enthusiastic, child,” said Mrs. Dering, coldly; “above all, I remark, in matters where Steven Lawrence is concerned. If you take my advice you

will just let these people manage their own affairs themselves. Mrs. Lawrence, like a good many wives, is more amused by other society than by her husband's; Mr. Lawrence, like a good many husbands, is more amused by baccarat and trente-et-un than by his wife. Of all things not new under the sun a household like this is the one that the least calls for hysterics or astonishment."

But Katharine seemed hardly to listen to Mrs. Dering's optimist and sufficiently-reasonable philosophy. "If it was anyone else," she said, half to herself, "any other man than Mr. Clarendon Whyte, I should not feel as I do."

"And I," said Mrs. Dering, "precisely because it is Mr. Clarendon Whyte, am disposed to be charitable. Mr. Whyte—we had best speak openly, Kate—is the last man living to ask Mrs. Steven Lawrence—without position, without money, without anything!—to run away from her husband."

"I—I am not thinking of running away!" cried Katharine, her face afire.

"Then what *are* you thinking of, Kate, dear? Please let us be reasonable. As a companion in her drives, or a partner at these third-class balls, it seems to me that Dora could hardly have done better than select

Mr. Clarendon Whyte. In London, I confess, it would be different; but in Paris, particularly among such a set as Dora has got into, Mr. Clarendon Whyte, no doubt, is taken at his own valuation still."

"Taken at his own valuation! in London it would be different!" said Katharine, opening her eyes. "I don't think when we were at Brighton you would have spoken like that, Arabella. You seem to think of Clarendon Whyte now what I, unsupported, have thought of him always."

"Exactly so," said Mrs. Dering, with perfect evenness of temper. "Did I not tell you—no? then, that does show how little I am to be accused of writing gossiping letters! Some weeks ago, just about the time you returned to Clithero, I think it must have been, all poor Mr. Whyte's true and authentic history came to light, and he has never shown his face either in London or Brighton since. He really was an impostor, Katharine. You were perfectly right in everything you used to say. Some one appeared on the scene—who was it now? well, never mind, some one who knew all about him, anyhow—and the great English connections, and the tigers he had shot in Bengal, and the sacks he had caused to be thrown into the Bosphorus,

were all a fiction. His father was a hatter in Oxford Street. Are you sure you won't have a glass of sherry? I'm afraid you will have more than an hour to wait before lunch."

"And you have never seen him since?—I don't want any sherry, thanks. You have banished the man from your house, because his father was a hatter?"

"I have done nothing at all," said Mrs. Dering, with a quiet smile. "I met Mr. Clarendon Whyte at a ball just after this ridiculous story came to light, and he asked me for a dance, and I had none left to give him. A man in that kind of position ought to have come early, or not have attempted to dance. I think, myself, it would have been more dignified, perhaps, to have stayed away altogether. A day or two afterwards I heard he left England. What strange vicissitudes there are in some human beings' lives, Kate!"

"And what strange blanks in some human beings' hearts!" thought Katharine, looking at her sister's handsome unmoved face. "I never cared, or pretended to care, for Mr. Clarendon Whyte," she cried, hastily; "but if I had seen as much of him as you did, Bella—and really he used to be kind to the

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mattered nothing. As long as Mr. Clarendon Whyte was "received," she had received him. As long as the Lawrences went on like other people, not coming to any open or avowed disgrace, there was something simply ridiculous to Mrs. Dering in gratuitously troubling one's head on their account. If they did come to disgrace, let it pass—with as little spoken commentary of ours, the well-thought-of relations, as possible! As for advice, a tolerably wide experience of life had taught her that its general effects were: first, to increase the down-hill pace of the persons advised; secondly, to react against the adviser. If Mrs. Lawrence (as it must be allowed was possible) was walking just as straight as the rest of the world, there could be no need of Katharine's presence in Paris; if Mrs. Lawrence was walking crooked, Katharine, for her own sake, must keep away from her. What would be the effect of a letter to Steven? Mrs. Dering was too ignorant of the customs of savage nations to say what the effect of anything would be on Steven Lawrence. She would certainly not advise writing to any civilized man on a theme so delicate as his own wife's frivolities. Baccarat, it must be remembered, could not, of its very nature, last for ever; neither could

driving in the Champs Elysées in daily new bonnets and dresses. As soon as the money was exhausted, Kate might rest assured Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence, steady-going Darby and Joan, would again return to their farm.

But all Mrs. Dering's reasoning, all Mrs. Dering's admirable morality of selfishness, was insufficient to banish the haunting fear that had taken possession of Katharine's mind; and so, two days later, a letter from Dora coming meanwhile, with still no mention in it of Clarendon Whyte's name, she mustered courage enough to broach the subject to the Squire. The wisdom of a kind and simple heart might be more serviceable than the wisdom of the world, perhaps, in such a strait as this. "Papa," quite abruptly she began, as they were riding home to dinner, along the same road where she had ridden that last night with Steven, "what sort of game do you consider baccarat?"

"Baccarat?" said the Squire; "well, I've never played it myself, and never seen it played; but I know it is the favourite game now-a-days, at which Englishmen abroad are fleeced by those rascally foreigners. Haverstock lost eight thousand pounds at it, they say, the first time he went to Paris after he came of age. Pray, Miss Kate, what has

put baccarat into that wise head of yours?"

"Steven Lawrence is playing at it, papa, that's all. I heard so a day or two ago; but I did not like at first to tell you, and Dot is going on very extravagantly, I'm afraid. I found it all out by accident, from a correspondent I have. Bella has heard the same story too, and—and don't you think we ought to do something to try and bring them home?"

Mr. Hilliard was dead silent; sure sign that one of the quick bursts of passion that occasionally exploded in the good little man's heart, was brewing. "The confounded fool that I've been!" he exclaimed at last. "Leaving the poor girl's money in her own hands, as he 'generously' wished, instead of tying it up, principal and interest, as tight as I could tie it. Of course he's playing at baccarat! I might have known the stock he comes of well enough to be sure he would play baccarat, and every other devilment, when temptation came. Gambling with his wife's money, and then, when it's gone, expecting me to lend him more! But he's mistaken; Master Lawrence is deucedly mistaken, if he thinks I am going to supply him with money for his pleasant vices. Baccarat, too! a man whose grandfather was no better than

a day-labourer, and who can barely spell his name himself, playing baccarat !”

Katharine fired up in a moment. “ I don’t see that the condition of a man’s grandfather heightens or lessens the folly of his gambling, papa ; and I don’t know why we should take for granted that Steven, if he is losing at all, is losing Dot’s money.”

“ He must be losing,” cried the Squire, angrily, and with the perfect conviction of injustice,—“and he must be losing her money—what other money has he got to lose ? But it’s no business of mine—it’s no business of mine ! If my advice had been taken, they would never have gone to Paris at all. Let him ruin himself. Dora will always know where to look for a home as long as I live ; but don’t let him come to me for help, that’s all I have to tell Master Lawrence. Don’t let him look to me for help.”

“ I hear, too,” said Katharine, determined, now that she had begun, to tell her whole story out, “ I hear that Dora is very extravagant ; is—is not going on as we could wish. She is always out at balls and theatres, papa, and alone—without her husband, I mean.”

“ Very naturally,” said Mr. Hilliard.

"You wouldn't have the poor girl run after him to the gaming-tables and his associates there, would you? You knew what Dora was when you advised her to go to Paris. Of course she is extravagant. Not one woman in fifty, let me tell you, would care to be saving over francs when she knew that her husband was ruining himself and her too by hundreds of pounds."

"And who says Steven Lawrence is doing anything of the kind?" exclaimed Katharine. "Oh, papa, I see I had better be perfectly honest with you. It's not Steven—it's not about Steven's going on that I am anxious, but about Dot. She is in a fast, bad set of people in Paris. She lets herself be seen everywhere with a man for whom she had a foolish kind of half-liking before she married, and altogether I'm afraid is getting her name lightly spoken of. I didn't like to tell you this straight out, and so I began first about Steven and his card-playing. Oh, papa, what does the loss of a little money matter? It is Dot we must think about, and bring back to Ashcot at once, if we can."

"Bring Dot back?" stammered the Squire. "Why, Kate, you don't mean to tell me—Good God, child! what does all this mean? why have you tried to keep it from me?"

The Squire reined in his horse to a standstill, and his face got as red as fire. "You don't mean to tell me that that girl—her honeymoon scarce over, and in love, as I thought, with her husband's very shadow—is misconducting herself?"

"Papa, dear," answered Katharine, with down-bent head, "there are many things that people do in the world—the fast world—now, that you would call misconduct. As much as I know about Dora, I tell you. She goes to balls and parties continually. She is seen at them all without her husband, and in the society of another man. People generally might think lightly of this, but I, knowing Steven as I do, think it looks very bad for poor Dora's future happiness."

"Then why don't he look after her?" said Mr. Hilliard. "She's vain, and pretty, in her style; just the sort of little woman—poor thing!—that these confounded Frenchmen would make much of. Why don't Lawrence look better after her?"

The Squire loosened his reins, and they walked on again through the darkening lanes in silence. At last, "Do you think if I was to write to Steven I should do good?" Katharine asked. "Just hint to him that it would be better if—"

"If he were to look a little closer after his own honour? No, Katharine, no! Never meddle between married people." The Squire said this much in the same tone in which he might have said, "Never meddle with burning pitch!" "However things turn out, *you* are sure to get blamed by both of them in the end."

"That's a good deal like what Arabella told me. Her advice was, to let everything take its own course. But—oh, papa," cried Katharine, "you and Arabella generally see everything so differently, that, I must confess, I did not expect to hear the same counsel from you."

Mr. Hilliard, upon this, put his horse into a trot; and nothing more was said until they were riding up the avenue at home. "Kate, my dear," he began then, "you were right to tell me of all this, and I'm ready to allow I spoke unjustly about Lawrence. The life he has led makes the lad younger than his years, and many an honest enough man will burn his fingers, for once in his life, under temptation. Dora is a little fool—that we always knew!—but we mustn't let her play the fool worse or longer than we can help. Now, what do you want me to do, child?"

"I want you to take me to Paris for a

week," cried Katharine; "that is, if mamma can spare us. It wouldn't be a great expense?"

"Never mind the expense," said the Squire.

"And either we would bring Dot home with us, or make Steven promise to take better care of her in Paris. Whether we fail or not, isn't it at least worth the trial?"

And before bed-time that night the plan was settled. Poor Mrs. Hilliard at first was refractory: could not see how Dora's affairs mattered to them now that she was married: could see, still less, why sick and dying people were to be sacrificed because of the ill-doings of those in health? She would go up to Arabella—no, she would not: she would destroy herself by going to Paris: no, she would be a blessed martyr and stay at home, and hope—hope that they would enjoy themselves without her! Finally, the scheme of martyrdom carried the day: the Squire promising to bring back a Cashmere shawl, silk dress, laces, and gloves, as propitiatory offerings; and, on the following Monday, two days hence, it was decided that Katharine and Mr. Hilliard should start. Not a word was to be written meanwhile to the

Lawrences themselves. "If you want to know what a truant school-boy is about," said the Squire, "don't tell him beforehand that you are coming to look after him! If we want really to find out how Dora and her husband are going on, we must walk quietly some fine morning to their lodgings, and just see them in their usual every-day life—don't you say so, Arabella?"

"I say nothing, Mr. Hilliard, I am too old-fashioned to enter into these philanthropic schemes. When I and my Richard were young it was accounted a man's duty to consider his *own* wife, to attend to the happiness of his *own* household, not of other people's!"

And then Mrs. Hilliard closed her eyes : to dream, undisturbed, about cachemires and silks, Parisian laces and gloves—a little, perhaps, of the days when she and her Richard were young, and when no such conditions of martyrdom were, under any circumstances, imposed upon her !

END OF VOL. II.

